



— THE —
PAPA MIKE
AIR CRASH
MYSTERY



ROSALIND JONES

THE PAPA MIKE AIR CRASH MYSTERY

Book One - The Investigation

&

Report of the Royal Norwegian Commission for the
Investigation of Civil Aircraft Accidents on the Accident to
Viking G-AHPM near Stavanger, Norway on 9th August, 1961.

Book Two - The Detection

&

Analysis of the Report and Runway 11 theory.
Analysis of new witness map and ILS theory.

*Dedicated to relatives and friends of the Lanfranc School party,
Cunard Eagle crew of Papa Mike, Stavanger Red Cross Hjelpekorps,
and all involved at the time.*

Sequel to 'The Lanfranc Boys'

THE PAPA MIKE AIR CRASH MYSTERY

ISBN 978-0-9531890-5-2

Published by Craigmore Publications
www.craigmore-publications.co.uk

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Book designed by Susan MacKinnon, CGL (Oban) Ltd.

All proceeds from this book will be donated to
The Stavanger Branch of the Norwegian Red Cross
The Norwegian Refugee Council
The RAF Benevolent Fund
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This book has been written using archival material from the National Archives of Britain and Norway, Hansard, newspapers from both countries, interviews, letters, and personal memories. Writers licence has been used thoughtfully, where necessary, to add to the reality of the book. No blame, or responsibility, is apportioned to any person or organisation.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Foreword	1
Acknowledgements	3
BOOK ONE – The Investigation	5
Glossary of Acronyms	6
Introduction	7
The Investigators	9
G-AHPM Papa Mike	14
Papa Mike’s Passengers and Crew	16
Papa Mike’s Last Flight – 9th August 1961	26
The Investigation 1961	
10th August	62
11th August	92
12th to 31st August	103
September	165
October	184
November	205
December	221
The Investigation 1962	
1st January to 31st October	226
The Royal Norwegian Commission Report	277
The Following Years between 1963 and 2011	307
BOOK TWO – The Detection	313
August 9th 2011	314
The 50th Anniversary	317
August 10th 2011	327
The Years 2012 – 2017	328
<i>Facts which readers should know</i>	
Captain Philip Guy Watts	331
The DC6. Capt. Watts Dual qualification	334
First Officer Smalley	336

Pilot Fatigue – Possibilities and Considerations	338
Stewardess Susan Elizabeth Endicott	345
Sola ATC Duty Officer, Sverre Hodne	345
Sola Airport and Runway 18	346
Ground controlled approach. GCA	348
Flight time limitations	349
QDMs recorded at Sola	349
Instrument landing system. ILS Procedure turn	350
Viking instrumentation. DC6 instrumentation	351
ILS/VOR switch	352
Effects of Wind on Papa Mike	353
Viking aircraft air safety record	354
Maintenance	356
Witness statements and locations	357
Witness Map	361
Annex 3	362
Reconstruction of last part of flight	363
Approx: Flight Path Tested 15.8.61	364
Explanation of the Swiss Cheese Model of Accident Causation	366
Examining Potential Holes in the Cheese	376
Improvements to Air Safety resulting from the Papa Mike air crash	384
Helene Bjorntvedt – Analysis of the Report, and Runway 11 Theory	389
The 40th Victim – Sverre Hodne	423
Summary	427
New Witness Map	432
Roger May – The Papa Mike Crash and the Instrument Landing System	443
Epilogue	457
Bibliography	463
<i>‘The Lanfranc Boys’</i>	464

FOREWORD

David Fellowes

Member of the Légion d'honneur for British World War II veterans.

Passionate about flying from his earliest years, David's lifetime, devoted to aviation, includes WWII 1940-1945 when he was a rear gunner in Lancaster Bombers, followed by a career with Eagle, Cunard Eagle, then British Eagle – as Chief Steward. Lobbying by David Fellowes and his colleagues, after the Papa Mike tragedy, brought about an important change in Flight Safety.

'I joined Cunard Eagle in 1960 as Chief Steward on Vikings, Viscount, DC4, DC6, and Boeing 707 aircraft. Following the devastating disaster to Viking G-AHPM on August 9th 1961, every member of 'Eagle' was in deep shock. Whilst I had trained cabin crew to deal with emergencies, nothing could have been done in Papa Mike's circumstances.

On August 15th 1961, DC6 G-APSA, properly dressed in purple, with Captain Beevers in command, and myself as cabin crew representative, we took off at 15:30 GMT from London Heathrow, arriving at Stavanger at 18:40. A ceremony was held, the crew paid their respects, and the aircraft was loaded with 34 small white coffins, two white adult coffins for the school masters, and three for the Viking crew. We left Stavanger at 21:30, arriving at London Gatwick at 00:35. We departed London Gatwick at 02:10 for London Heathrow.

I had flown operations over Germany and knew what it was like to lose crews, but this was different, – 34 children and two masters going on the holiday of a lifetime, – killed in one of our aircraft. I still remember it. Never to be forgotten.

Following the enquiry, the Operations Director, Captain John Sauvage, asked me to set up a training school for all crew members and to re-write the Emergency Section of the Training Manuals, with the co-operation of the Fleet Captains and the Chief Pilot. I was given the title of Aircrew Safety Equipment Training Officer (A.S.E.T.O.). My 'office' was a Viking cockpit whilst the

detached fuselage became a classroom equipped with all necessary training material from the various fleets. I emphasized to trainees that cabin crew were the most important people in the event of an accident. They should act as though the flight crew had been killed. To this end I designed and produced a Cabin Crew Licence which was issued to each crew member indicating that they had been tested on First Aid, Emergency Drills, Safety Equipment, Fire Drills, and Dinghy Drills, – all re-tested annually.

British Eagle came to an end in 1968, but I continued in Safety Training with other UK Independents and Foreign Airlines.’

This was a positive legacy resulting from the Papa Mike Air Crash. David Fellowes was a Volunteer at the ‘Wings Museum’ and was one of the last of thousands of ‘Bomber Boys’ of WWII Bomber Command.



*Cunard Eagle’s DC6, G-APSA, at Sola Airport, 15th August 1961.
Hearses and lorries from Stavanger hospital bringing coffins to the hangar at Sola for their departure ceremony. G-APSA crew standing in respect under the fuselage.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed their expertise to this double volume. Their input has enabled ‘jig-saw’ pieces of puzzle, deemed by the Press to be ‘The Papa Mike Mystery’, to piece together what happened on August 9th 1961. Clouded by time, and originally shrouded in secrecy, facts emerged enabling as true an account of Viking G-AHPM’s final flight, the rescue operation, and the international investigation, to be written in this book.

I hadn’t intended to write a sequel to *The Lanfranc Boys*, yet two books grew from the information. The story of the original investigation had to be told so that relatives and friends of the victims could know the truth. Obscure facets of social history are now revealed. Readers, including aviation enthusiasts, will gain an overview of the multiple threads involved: the airline company, the plane, its captain, its final flight, air traffic control, crash site investigation, international political machinations, reports, human failures and their repercussions, and finally what was learned, and what changes were made to improve aviation safety.

Book One, ‘The Investigation’, chronicles the work of the original investigators. I am grateful to Egil Eriksson for use of his photo of the Norwegian team and other photos. Also to Monica Porter of the Daily Mail’s ‘Missing and Found’ column, through whom family researcher, David Kilby, found me relatives of AIB’s investigation team. Richard Feltham, Michael Head, and Anne Mortley (née Warren), are thanked for kindly providing photos and memories of their fathers. Retired Detective Inspector Clement Richards, found details about Sir Michael Custance. Jonquil Nicol put me in contact with new witness Wenche Davies (née Brunost). Helene Bjørntvedt found new witness Kåre Voster, provided archived Norwegian newspapers, and Sola Airport photo. Nick Barlay allowed me to include extracts of his father’s book ‘Air Crash Detectives’. I am grateful to Jon Barstad at the Norwegian National Archives, for valuable documentary evidence, and to the personnel at the UK National Archives at Kew, who made available all their G-AHPM files. Tom Chippendale, Gordon Clack, Dr. Simon Karginoff, and Jack Massey provided valuable memories.

Two aviation experts who assisted me greatly with Book Two, 'The Detection', are Asst. ATC Helene Bjørntvedt and British Eagle Archivist Eric Tarrant. Helene provided an important and helpful section. It contains her analysis and comments on the Royal Norwegian Commission Report, and her theory as to the possible cause of Papa Mike's crash. Eric very helpfully provided information and photos when requested and was invaluable in corroborating facts and correcting errors. I am very grateful to both Helene and Eric for their loyal support in a quest to solve a mystery that had touched them both.

I am very grateful to those in Norway who helped with memories, or expertise: Frode Berge, Arild Drechsler, Arne Helvik, Ola Lekvam, Asbjørn and Terje Løland, Karl A. Nilsen, Kjell Terje Osmundsen, Bjørn N. Skogen, Jan M. Taarland, Sofus Tønnessen, and Kåre Voster, plus two Norwegian 'airmen' who contributed vivid memories of that time. My special thanks go to Sverre Sørheim for sharing remembrances of his uncle Sverre Hodne. Tor Inge Jøssang of *Stavanger Aftenblad* is thanked for his valuable assistance.

Many British aviation experts helped with their knowledge and experience of flying in the 1960's. Three important contributors to the quest to solve the Papa Mike mystery wished to remain unnamed. Their understanding of aviation, and the aviation investigation world, was invaluable. Captain Chris Perry suggested the Swiss Cheese Model of Accident Causation. Pilots Tim Granshaw and Lieut. Cdr. Michael Abbey MBE RN assisted with practical knowledge, including experience of Sola Airport. All are sincerely thanked.

Bryony Hall of The Society of Authors is thanked for her helpful advice.

Warm thanks go to my relatives: Marie Birketvedt-Jones, for interviewing Norwegian witnesses on my behalf, and for accurately translating numerous official Norwegian documents and newspapers, and Chris Jones for creating the website www.lanfranc-holtaheia.co.uk. Jenny A. Green is commended for her photos of the 50th Anniversary. Martyn Green provided his tape recording of the BBC news announcements. I am indebted to Roger May for his professional legal and literary knowledge and coming up with a plausible theory.

My grateful thanks go to Susan MacKinnon of CGL Oban. Susan cheerfully contended with numerous revisions, remained a faithful ally and helpful adviser, and kept me straight whilst compiling this book. Her format and design is testament to, and commendation of, her creative skills as a book designer.

Last but not least, this book could not have been written without the support and encouragement of Nick Jones. To him go my greatest thanks.

Rosalind Jones

BOOK 1

THE
INVESTIGATION

By Rosalind Jones

Researched and written from documentary and photographic information from the UK National Archives and the Norwegian National Archives, Hansard, British and Norwegian newspapers, interviews, and personal memories.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AIB	Accident Investigation Branch (U.K.) (Which became AAIB.)	IFR	Instrument Flight Rules
AAIB	Air Accident Investigation Branch.	ILS	Instrument Landing System
AD	Airworthiness Directive	Kc/s	Kilocycles per second
ADF	Automatic Direction Finding	Kts	Knots
ADR	Advisory Route	LEC	Stavanger Consul Station – Lima Echo Charlie
ANO	Air Navigation Order	LHR	London Heath Row
AOC	Air Operators Certificate	LII	Lima India (India) – beacon on Island of Rennesøy
ARB	Air Registration Board (U.K.)	LIZ	Lima India (Zulu) – beacon on island of Rott
ASG	Air Safety Group (U.K.)	Mc/s	Quantity of electricity flowing for one second
ASN	Aviation Safety Network	MET	Meteorology
ATA	Air Transport Association	MKR	Marker
ATC	Air Traffic Control/Controller	MoA	Ministry of Aviation
ATCC	Air Traffic Control Centre	NDB	None directional beacon
BALPA	British Air Line Pilots Association	Nm	Nautical miles
BEA	British European Airways	NST	Norwegian Summer Time
BIATA	British Independent Air Transport Association	OM	Outer marker
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation	OPS	Operation
BST	British Summer Time	OTP	One time pad encryption
BUA	British United Airways	OZR	Billum non-directional beacon
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority (U.K.)	PM	Papa Mike (G-AHPM)
CAFU	Civil Aviation Flying Unit	QDM	Indication of magnetic heading to steer in still air
CAT	Clear Air Turbulence	QFE	Barometric pressure setting of altimeter so that on landing aircraft will reveal zero.
CFT	Controlled Flight into Terrain	QNH	Barometric setting for altimeter causing it to read height above mean sea level on landing.
CIA	Chief Inspector of Accidents (AIB)	RAE	Royal Aircraft Establishment
CRM	Cockpit Resource Management	R/B	Radio beacon
CVR	Cockpit Voice Recorder	RNoAF	Royal Norwegian Air Force
DC3	Douglas propeller driven airliner	R/T	Radio Telephony
DC4	Douglas four engine piston propeller drive airliner	SAS	Scandinavian Airlines System
DC6	Douglas piston powered airliner	S/O	Second Officer
DME	Distance Measuring Equipment	TAS	True air speed
EMF	Electro Magnetic Field	TWR	Tower at airfield
ETA	Estimated time of arrival	VASI	Visual Approach Slope Indicator
ENZV	Sola Airfield	VFR	Visual Flight Rules
FIR	Flight Information Region	VHE	Very High Energy
F/O	First Officer	VHF	Very high frequency
GCA	Ground Controlled Approach	VOR	VHF Omnidirectional Range
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time.	Z	Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)
HF	High frequency	ZO	Zulu Oscar, Sola localiser beacon
HT	High voltage tester	ZZ	Zulu Zulu VOR at Varhaug
IAS	Indicated air speed		
IATA	International Air Transport Association		
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation		
IFALPA	International Federation of Airline Pilot's Associations.		

INTRODUCTION

In August 1961. Harold Macmillan was Britain's Conservative Prime Minister. Premier Einar Gerhardsen was Norway's Prime Minister. John F. Kennedy was President of the United States of America. Nikita Khrushchev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. WWII had ended 16 years previously, but since 1947 the Cold War overshadowed peacetime. Whilst a wall was built dividing the population of Berlin, the people of south London were united by grief. In Norway, the lives of courageous people from Stavanger and Strand, were blighted by a tragedy that became a part of their history, and was to remain a mystery.

On August 9th 1961, disaster struck Croydon. Thirty four schoolboys and two masters from Lanfranc Secondary Modern School, and three crew of Cunard Eagle's Vickers Viking, registration G-AHPM, call sign Alpha Hotel Papa Mike, were killed when, inexplicably, it crashed near the summit of Holtaheia, a mountain in southern Norway. 'Papa Mike' became notorious in the days, weeks, and months that followed as newspaper journalists on both sides of the North Sea picked over clues and published theories as to why a British plane, flown by an experienced captain, so close to landing at Stavanger's Sola Airport, should have flown off course into the nearby mountains of Strand. A very detailed investigation of the crash ensued and **The Report of the Royal Norwegian Commission for the Investigation of Civil Aircraft Accidents** (hereafter called the Report, was published in 1962. It's conclusion as to the cause of the crash, dated 28th May 1962 but not published until September 21st 1962, simply stated, *'The cause of this accident was a deviation from the prescribed flight path for reasons unknown.'* It was signed by J.K. Christie (President), Gullbrand Nyhus, and Nils K. Jørstad. The reason why Papa Mike crashed seemed an enigma. No one could adequately explain why the Viking had deviated from its prescribed flight path. It was an unsolved mystery. Papa Mike's pilots were not blamed and it was deemed that, in terms of aviation safety, nothing could be learnt from the disaster. For the relatives and friends of the victims the report was a complete let-down. They'd wanted answers. They

got none. Why had it happened? Who was to blame? For some it seemed a whitewash, for others a bitter disappointment that nothing positive had been gleaned from the tragedy. Stephen Barlay wrote in his book *'Air Crash Detective'* that they were *'Wasted Lives'*. But now recent research has shown that this wasn't true. Some modicum of comfort could have been gained by the knowledge that in fact lessons *had* been learnt, and that safety precautions *were* put in place, but this was never made known. Unable to find closure, the lives of those relatives and friends were blighted ever since that fateful day, August 9th 1961. So too were the lives of rescuers in Norway.

Fifty years to the day, on August 9th 2011, the 50th Anniversary of the Lanfranc – Holtahelia Plane Crash, Croydon made headlines again.

The prequel to this book, *'The Lanfranc Boys'* was written to commemorate the lives of all the victims, and to record the traumatic and heroic work of the Norwegian Red Cross volunteers. It was a record of a unique historic event when total strangers united in heartfelt grief. The people of Stavanger and Strand stood shoulder to shoulder with Croydon's traumatised population at that terrible time. Not recorded in *'The Lanfranc Boys'*, because I had no information at the time of writing, was the exhaustive investigation which commenced immediately following the discovery of the wrecked plane. Painstaking investigative research continued over eight months, involving aviation experts, and also diplomats, in Norway and Britain. Apart from snippets of information revealed in occasional press reports the investigation was shrouded in secrecy. Once the Air Accident Report was published all relevant documents were locked away in the National Archives of each country. In Britain these were originally 'caged' for seventy five years. The reasons why Papa Mike crashed was an unsolved mystery and was expected to remain so. Its memory might have sunk without trace but for *'The Lanfranc Boys'*. I had no idea that writing that book would re-open the investigation to *new* air crash investigators and aviation experts.

Rosalind Jones

THE INVESTIGATORS

The Royal Norwegian Aviation Accident Commission Flyhavarikommisjonen

Colonel Johan K. Christie – Head of Aviation Accident Committee 1959-1962. Director General, Directorate of Equipment and supply, Ministry of Defence. Chairman, Aircraft Accidents Investigation Commission (AAIC). A WWII hero decorated with the War Cross with Sword, the St Olav's Medal with Oak Branch, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Service Order, Order of the British Empire, the Bronze Star Medal, and the German Cross of Merit. In 1946 he worked in Det Norske Luftartsselskap before joining NATO where he worked from 1949 until 1952, then Forsvarsdepartementets materielldirektorat, additionally taking on Norway's Aviation Accident Committee in 1959.

Lt. Colonel Nils K. Jørstad – Escaping Norway in WWII, he trained as a pilot and served in 331 Squadron. Credited with shooting down 6 German aircraft, plus 2 'probable' he was awarded the DFC in 1944. He rose to Colonel in the Royal Norwegian Air Force, later working for NATO in Paris.

John Michelsen – Inspector, Aeronautical Meteorological Services, Air Traffic Control Inspector, Norwegian Directorate of Civil Aviation.

Truls Dahl – Chief, Airworthiness Section, Norwegian Directorate of Civil Aviation.

Gullbrand Nyhus – Oslo Police Inspector.

T. Ravn Tollefsen – Stavanger Police Sergeant.

John Eriksen – Meteorology expert.

Norvald Omberg – Radio Engineer, Norwegian Directorate of Civil Aviation.

B. Egeberg – Watch expert.

Civil Aviation Officials in Oslo Luftfartsdirektoratet

Einar Bøe – First Director (1947 – 1964) of the Aviation Directorate. Responsible for civilian airports in Norway. Previously the Norwegian Ministry of Defence were responsible for operating the airports, including the civilian sections, but this was delegated to the Aviation Council within the Norwegian Ministry of Aviation.

Sverre Holsten – Secretary of the Norwegian Civil Aviation Board (Civil Air). Deputy Chief, Legal Bureau, DCA.

THE INVESTIGATION

The Norwegian Investigators



*Thursday 10th August 1961. Investigators (left to right)
Sverre Holsten, Colonel Nils K. Jørstad, Colonel Johan K. Christie,
Police Inspector Gullbrand Nyhus, Police Officer T. Ravn Tollefsen.
(Photo E. Eriksson.)*

THE INVESTIGATION

The British Investigators Accident Investigation Board - AIB

Chief Inspector of Accidents P.G. Tweedie – RAF Flight Lt. 1920's. Captain on Handley Page H.42 biplanes of Imperial Airways. Flight Lt. in RAF Reserve, in 1938. Joined AIB early in WWII, becoming Deputy Chief Inspector under Air Commodore Sir Vernon Brown, succeeding as Chief Inspector in 1952. In overall charge of the Papa Mike investigation, he managed AIB when many accidents were occurring. He said his job left no room for sentimentality. Retired 1963.

Deputy Chief Inspector of Accidents J.W. Duggan – RAF Reserve, Class 'A' officer 1932. He flew daily newspapers for Wrightson and Pearse, Croydon to Paris, in all weathers. 1935 chief pilot of Wrightways. 1938 Cumberbatch award. 1954 Wing Commander.

Principal Inspector Ray C. Warren O.B.E. – Senior Inspector AIB 1948. President, Court of Inquiry, into fatal collision between British Vickers Viking and Russian Yak fighter over Berlin. German witness statements implicated the Soviet pilot. The British pilots were exonerated, whilst the Soviets maintained it was their fault, resulting in a diplomatic standoff in early Cold War years. Retired 1972.

Senior Inspector Norman S. Head – RAF Squadron Leader WWII. A fighter pilot he flew Hurricanes, Defiants, Beaufighters, Mosquitos, and Meteors. Awarded the DFC, he was credited with destroying 4 Junkers JU88 and 2 Focke-Wulf FW190, and 6 flying bombs. Post war he joined Airwork, then became Chief Pilot for Sudan Airways. Aircraft piloted included Vikings, Hermes, Viscounts, and Comets before joining AIB in 1959. He retired in 1973.

Senior Investigating Officer R.G. 'Geoff' Feltham – Geoff Feltham served in the RAF from 1939 until March 1946. During WWII, he dropped supplies over Burma. Between 1947 and 1950 he worked for Hunting Air transport limited, flying Vikings. Awarded the Air Efficiency Award, he held: Engineer A&C, Flight Engineer, P Pilot, and G Pilot Cert. licences. Nearly all his flying hours were in Viking aircraft across Europe and Africa.

AIB Administration Officer Hubert 'Hugh' Kelsey Gordon-Burge – WWII RAF pilot in Coastal Command. Senior Captain with Aer Lingus 1946 to 1955, when he joined the Ministry of Aviation's Accident Investigation Branch. In 1965 he joined BEA, becoming their Air Safety Adviser. He was twice Chairman of the United Kingdom Air Safety Committee. In 1974 an award, posthumously set up in his name, instituted by the Board of British Airways, was given to the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators to be presented annually, for 'an outstanding contribution to air safety'.

Cunard Eagle Chief Inspector - R.R.H. Aspden

THE INVESTIGATION

The British Aib Investigators



R. G. 'Geoff' Feltham
Senior Investigating Officer



Ray C. Warren O.B.E.
Principal Inspector



Norman S. Head
Senior Inspector

THE INVESTIGATION

Ministry of Aviation Officials

Ministers of Aviation.

Peter Thorneycroft – 27th July 1960 – 16th July 1962.

Julian Amery – 16th July 1962 – 18th October 1964.

The Minister of Aviation's Private Secretaries: (P.S./Minister.)

D.A. Lovelock.

C.B. Benjamin.

Parliamentary Secretaries. (Parl. Sec.)

Geoffrey Rippon – 22nd October 1959 – 9th October 1961.

Christopher Woodhouse – 9th October 1961 – 16th July 1962.

Permanent Secretary. (P.S.)

Henry Hardman – (Knighted in 1962) 1960 – 1963.

Deputy Secretaries. (Dep. Sec.)

Michael M.V. Custance – C.B. Dep. Sec. B.

Under Secretaries. (U.S.)

Mr. R. R. Goodison – (U.S./A.S.G.) Under Secretary Aviation Safety & General.

Dame Alison Munro – (U.S./A.G.P.)

Director of Flight Safety.

G.W. Stallibrass.

Administration.

Hugh K. Gordon-Burge.

R.P. Garnons Williams – Wing Commander.

Chief Inspector of Accidents.

P.G. Tweedie – Honorary Group Captain. (CIA)

Deputy Chief Inspector of Accidents.

J.W. Duggan – Honorary Wing Commander. (DCIA)

Inspectors.

R.C. Warren – O.B.E. Principal Inspector

N. S. Head – Senior Inspector.

R. G. Feltham – Senior Investigating Officer.

G-AHPM 'PAPA MIKE'

G-AHPM was a Vickers Viking 1A type 610 aircraft. Originally named '*Verdera*', it was renamed '*Lord Rodney*', but became infamous as '*Papa Mike*' when it crashed on Holtåheia on August 9th 1961. All aboard died instantly. British newspapers renamed the Viking '*Papa Mike*'. The victims were three Cunard Eagle Airways crew, 34 teenage boys and two masters from Lanfranc Secondary Modern School in Croydon. It was Norway's worst air disaster and the worst peacetime accident for a British school at that time.

Papa Mike was built in 1946 by Vickers-Armstrong Ltd. at Weybridge. With 5 hours 15 minutes flying time it was acquired by British European Airways (BEA) in March 1947. Named after a British Admiral, it flew for BEA that May. In 1953 Eagle Airways Ltd bought it, painting it in RAF colours for their government trooping contract. Militarily coded XF632, '*Lord Rodney*' carried troops and their families from Blackbushe airport to Cyprus, Gibraltar, Malta, Tripoli, and Fayid in the Suez Canal Zone. With 11,132 hours 45 minutes flying time accumulated, in February 1955 it was transferred to Eagle Aircraft Services Ltd. Two years later it was converted to a 610/3B type with the addition of a freight door, and transferred back to Eagle Airways Ltd. On 16th January 1961, aged almost 14 years, it was transferred to Cunard Eagle Airways Ltd. and repainted in their silver, red, and white livery with a huge stylised white 'Eagle' E on a black-painted tail fin. It had been modified to accommodate 36 passengers, and during the refit, a new advanced American navigation aid, VOR type SR 31 was installed. Prestigious Cunard Shipping had recently amalgamated with Eagle Airways and their entire fleet carried this new corporate image. G-AHPM didn't remain band-box smart very long because, four days later, on January 20th, during an evening approach to Basle, in a heavy rainstorm, it undershot the runway by 4 kilometres and flew at almost ground level through a wood of birch trees. The pitot head was knocked off and birch twigs rammed into the oil cooler intakes. On hearing successive bangs the pilot put on full power and miraculously climbed away before carrying out a normal landing. Temporary repairs were carried out at Basle. G-AHPM was dented and torn. Less than eight months later it wasn't to be so lucky.

THE INVESTIGATION

VICKERS VIKING 1A TYPE 610
G-AHPM 1946 - 1961
'VERDERA' - 'LORD RODNEY' - 'PAPA MIKE'



Papa Mike, pre 1961



*Viking G-AHPM, wearing its final Cunard Eagle Airways livery
at Heathrow in late 1960 (David Cotterell)*

THE INVESTIGATION – 9th AUGUST 1961

Families in Croydon were glued to their radios. A brother tape-recorded the BBC's news flashes. *'...the control tower lost contact with him. The weather at the time was bad with driving rain and a high wind. The Norwegian authorities say they hope the plane may have landed in a neighbouring fjord or at another airport. Ships and helicopters have been searching the area, so far without success. The Company have not stated to whom the plane was chartered. A second Cunard Eagle plane which left later arrived safely...'*

Midnight oil burned in Croydon homes consumed by blackness.

The lights of Fleet Street blazed as reporters covered calls to Cunard Eagle's offices and anyone they could find with information in Norway. Just after midnight British time they learned that the search had been called off until first light. With no further news they rushed to type their stories. Most were accurate but some were needlessly fabricated. Metaphorically, like the cold, wet, searchers in Norway, Britain's newsmen were working in the dark.

The Daily Express had the most informative account, together with photos of a Viking, Lanfranc School badge, Pilot Philip Watts, the boy with the last place on the plane, and details of the school trip. Someone at Sola had informed their staff reporter that Papa Mike was to have taken Chesterfield School home, - which added to the story's poignancy.

The Daily Sketch reported:

'All last night in driving rain and howling winds, helicopters, minesweepers and planes scoured the seas for any sign of survivors. Then at 1.30 a.m. the weather cancelled any chance of resuming land rescue operations until daylight... Directing the search for the Viking is Stavanger Police Chief Mr K. N. Stilloff... earlier he said; 'I'm afraid there is little hope. We believe the plane has crashed in the wild Haugesund mountains 30 kilometres from here. We have made hundreds of telephone calls and reports have come in from people who heard a plane flying low overhead. From these we plotted the path of the plane. It went east — towards the mountains. All the islands off the coast are inhabited and we believe that a crash or explosion would have been heard' he said. 'We have four minesweepers and lots of small craft searching. But the weather is very bad. There is a force seven gale blowing. It is raining hard and pitch dark. As soon as it is light dozens of military aircraft will begin to search the mountains... Teams are ready to climb into the mountains as soon as anything is seen.' There is no airstrip in the east. Another possibility was that the plane had crash-landed on a lake. But Chief Stilloff

THE INVESTIGATION – 9th AUGUST 1961

said this was 'unlikely'. He added; 'In his last message the pilot said he was coming in to land. The weather was terrible then, and very windy. The pilot said he was cruising at about 2000 feet and could not see anything. But he did not ask for help.'

'Haugesund mountains', 'dozens of military aircraft', and Captain Watts allegedly saying that he '*could not see a thing*'? Press fabrications. Captain Watts's 'final message' was augmented by other journalists, but the pained Norwegian comment '*He did not ask for help*' — was the nub of angst shared by the searchers. Why hadn't Captain Watts asked for GCA and been guided down by radar? (This pertinent question was to become a major issue with both the British and Norwegian press and a vexed diplomatic bone of contention between the two countries.)

The Daily Mirror reached Stavanger's Mayor, Jan Johnsen, who was quoted:

'Several hundred people searched the hilly area in stormy weather' and 'The port's fishing fleet joined the sea search, nearly every boat answering the appeal.'

Daily Mail journalists talked to Stavanger's police who informed them of the radio news bulletins. They reported:

'A few minutes' later farmers between Stavanger and the city of Haugesund, 25 miles to the north, began phoning in to say they had heard engines passing overhead.'

They also stated that a Norwegian Navy spokesman had said their minesweepers would continue to hunt through the night.

Concurrently at London Airport, Cunard Eagle staff manned telephones in a brilliantly lit hangar, now their OPS room. Office staff, cabin crew, company volunteers, all helped answer scores of calls from worried relatives of the boys. Only bona fide calls were put through. Operational Director, Captain John Sauvage, informed reporters that if they didn't get satisfactory news in the next few hours then company officials would fly to Norway to help operations there.

Teachers from the second Cunard Eagle Viking which landed safely at Sola were interviewed, admitting they'd had a bumpy landing. This party of children came from Linton Village College, Cambridgeshire, and Formby County Secondary School, Lancashire. Miss Gunnbjørg Vik hustled them outside into the blustery night, and on to a bus to Stavanger. The Chesterfield boys, none the wiser, were ushered on to G-AMNX. Captain Stephenson and First Officer Dobson, having

made a fast turnaround, took off in trepidation. They were worried. What had happened to Phil Watts, Murray Smalley and Susan Endicott? The possibility didn't bear thinking about!

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Meanwhile in the hills of Strand the weather conditions had worsened and Johannes Holta finally walked home. At around 20:00 hours, 10pm local time, he passed a stream tumbling to Krokavatnet and smelt something odd he couldn't identify. Thinking the owner of a nearby cabin had been painting he trudged downwards to Holta through heavy rain, mist, and strong wind. Home again, his family asked Johannes if he'd heard or seen anything. When he replied that he'd certainly heard a loud clap of thunder his family shook their heads saying — there hadn't been any thunder!

At 21:39 GMT, (11.39 p.m. local time) an unscheduled flight to London took off from Sola. Braathens SAFE Fokker F-27 registration LN-SUN was going to the aid of Cunard Eagle. Telephone conversations between Sola and London Airport confirmed that Captain Sauvage, Captain Henderson, and Eagle's chief inspector Mr. R.R.H. Aspden urgently needed to get to Sola. So did a flock of reporters dressed in their London garb of gaberdine macs, trilby hats and lace up shoes.

The storm worsened and a light aircraft at Sola was flipped over by the wind. When asked about the missing Viking's final message a spokesman said: *'The last radio message was a perfectly routine one, and was concerned with calling in to Stavanger before landing. There was absolutely no suspicion at the time that anything was wrong.'*

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In Croydon policemen in police cars, on bicycles, and on foot called at every parent's home in case there were some who had not heard the news. Many parents were unable to comprehend that their son's plane was missing. Some gathered at Lanfranc School and found Headmaster Mr Albert 'Tommy' Fowle fielding anxious telephone calls. Croydon's news reporters were roaming the streets, gleaning what information they could.

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THE INVESTIGATION – 9th AUGUST 1961

Throughout Rogaland people were glued to their radios desperately hoping there would be good news and that the missing plane would be found — safe.

Stavanger's deputy Red Cross Hjelpekorps leader Sofus Tønnessen heard the news flash and telephoned the police headquarters to offer their help in any rescue. He was told to get a team of twenty Red Cross - and be on standby. The air search was joined by a British Shackleton from Scotland, whilst ships scoured the fjords east of Stavanger as well as the North Sea. Everything possible was done. Cunard Eagle had informed Sola that the Viking carried 34 children. It wasn't a mixed batch of passengers (important though they all would have been) it was a group of school boys led by two masters from the same school, and all from the same town. The rescuers were aghast. The lost plane was full of youngsters - kids just like their own kids! More than ever they were desperate to find them —ALIVE!

Knowing the terrain and suspecting the worst, the Norwegian Aircraft Accident Commission had been notified that an accident was to be feared. In Oslo the Secretary of the Commission, Johan K. Christie informed his team to leave for Stavanger early the next day. Colonel Nils K. Jørstad and Police Inspector Gullbrand Nyhus immediately packed their bags. The Director-General of Civil Aviation, Einar Bøe, and Secretary Sverre Holsten, in Oslo, were alerted.

In Stavanger, Red Cross leader Sofus Tønnessen enlisted colleague Anna Nordland to contact their 20 most capable Hjelpekorps members, to be equipped and ready to go wherever directed first thing in the morning!

23:45 hours (1.45 a.m. Norwegian local time). The fruitless search was finally abandoned due to darkness and atrocious weather conditions. By now the police had linked red circled locations and the trend ended in Strand, possibly near Holta. Search aircraft hadn't ventured there because strong winds, low cloud, and heavy rain made this area dangerous and impossible to view. Now the airmen were ordered to leave their barracks at first light — and head for Strand.

THE INVESTIGATION – 10th AUGUST 1961

As the Commission continued their exacting work, reporters from Britain were already dictating their stories from any telephone they could requisition. Jack Hand of the *Evening Standard* reported:

‘I have just returned from the scene. Pieces of burned-out wreckage are spread over a large area. All the passengers appear to have been killed instantly. Because of the fire, identification may be difficult in many cases. Only the after part of the fuselage was intact with a number of the dead children and the two teachers still strapped in their seats. Although the airplane crashed only two miles from a farm, nobody heard because of the bad weather.’

His colleague, hard-bitten Sydney Preston, hired a light plane from Sola to get an overview. He filed his story:

‘The wreck of a Viking airliner in which 34 Croydon schoolboys, two masters and the crew of three died last night stood like an enormous funeral pyre on the bleak mountain-top of Holta, near Stavanger, today. Then the wind blew and scattered ashes down the rocky slopes... This afternoon I flew over the crash scene and looked down at the unfriendly slopes with a bare scrub covering the rocks. The pilot had to point out to me twice where the wreckage lay. I have seen the aftermath of plane crashes before. But never anything like this. Normally the outline of the plane can still be distinguished and traces of the passenger’s belongings are scattered on the ground. Today there were none of these things. The wreckage had collapsed in a pile of dark dust and ashes. Fifty yards away down the mountainside a 3ft strip of silver with blackened lettering was the only evidence that this had been an airplane. I might have been looking down on the last traces of a Guy Fawkes bonfire. The twin-engine red and white airliner Papa Mike owned by Cunard-Eagle hit the mountain about 30 feet from the top and burst into flames. But another 30 feet would not have saved it. Five hundred yards ahead and directly in its path was another peak – 150 feet higher.’

This sad fact had also been observed by the Commission who had climbed down to the point just below the summit where Papa Mike had impacted. At this point the lichen-clad rock was bare, the Archean schist paler, bruised, but burnished. They examined the circular impact mark, debating whether the Viking was climbing, or in horizontal flight. With the edge of the plateau top not far above, they could see that just a few feet higher and it would have cleared the top of Holtatheia... Captain Sauvage had been helicoptered to the site and he'd stared over the edge pensively. Just a few feet higher... but on turning around he could see a higher summit. He shook his head sorrowfully.

How a British airliner could have flown into dangerous terrain was foremost in the minds of several British journalists. Whilst his colleague Walter Partington had rushed to Holtåheia, *Daily Express* journalist, Keith Thompson had based himself at Sola to interview any aviation experts he could buttonhole. Both filed stories for their paper's 3 a.m. 11th August edition. Thompson reported:

‘It may take six months to find the full answer to the Viking airliner disaster in Norway. But almost certainly the wind and lashing rain helped lure the Cunard Eagle plane Papa Mike on to the peak 21 miles from Stavanger... Could the disaster have been averted? Last night the big question was ‘Why wasn’t ‘talk-down’ radar, official term: ground control approach opened up again? If it had been used effectively it could have given the warning that the pilot, Captain Philip Watts, needed, that he was veering towards the north-east and danger. And even at 21 miles range the red light could have been signalled... There is no official record so far that Captain Watts asked for GCA It also seems that no warnings were given about the deterioration in the weather in the area. At Stavanger yesterday a Scandinavian Air Services pilot said that the accident might not have happened if the radar had not closed down.’

Further to this the Norwegian chief of air traffic, Birger Grinde, told him:

‘Three airfields, Sola, Gardermoen, and Bodø, all have radar equipment. This is mainly for military use but for the time being tests are made to see whether the military radar equipment may be used also in civilian aviation. We do not have enough trained personnel to run the radar installations all the 24 hours.’

Thomson cornered a senior SAS captain, who said:

‘I have made 2,000 to 3,000 instrument landing approaches at Sola and I have never had any difficulties. I have seldom asked for GCA I think that the pilot who crashed turned right instead of left. It is as simple as that. And with a 70 mile-an-hour gale behind him he was blown off course into the mountains.’

Meanwhile, in those mountains, helicopters had been flying in and out all day transporting important personnel. Keith's colleague, Walter Partington rushed back to Stavanger, first headlong on foot, then gratefully by taxi, and finally, by ferry. Ambassador Sir John Walker flew back.

• • •

Postmen on their afternoon rounds delivered letters of condolence to Croydon homes – where curtains were drawn shut. Postmen in London carried official letters to Cunard Eagle's Head Office in Edgware Road and to the Ministry of Aviation in The Strand. Telegraph boys on bicycles were busy. Queen Elizabeth,

THE INVESTIGATION – 10th AUGUST 1961

aboard The Royal Yacht Britannia off the Scottish coast, sent a message to Peter Thorneycroft saying she was deeply shocked by the disaster. She also sent a message of sympathy to the families. King Olav of Norway sent a message of condolence to the Queen – his cousin. The Norwegian Prime Minister, Mr. Einar Gerhardsen, sent a telegram to Prime Minister Macmillan:

‘Most deep-felt sympathy of our government and people of Norway for the untimely loss of so many young lives.’

Telegrams arrived at Croydon Town Hall from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Norwegian Charge D’Affaires. Shocked head teachers from schools all over England wrote empathetically to Lanfranc’s headmaster Albert Fowle, knowing this tragedy would have shaken him and his school to their very foundations.

At Lanfranc School, national newsmen imbibed the sad atmosphere and nabbed anyone who could supply a quote for their sorrowful stories. Many had interviewed tearful ‘Tommy’ Fowle, who had repeated that ‘his boys’ on the doomed trip were ‘the cream of the school’. Some pushy reporters, desperate for a poignant angle, sneaked in to Mr Budd’s science lab and scrawled an equation on the black board, falsifying ‘his last lesson’. They were unceremoniously ejected. Author Godfrey Winn, tipped off by *The Daily Express*, presented himself unannounced at the homes of two boys who shared the surname – Green. He went away deeply affected from experiencing the grief of just two of the 36 Lanfranc families. He wrote an article that couldn’t be read with dry eyes.

The whole of Britain and England in particular was struck by the tragedy. Parents everywhere wondered how they would feel if this had happened to *their* children – and many wrote to say so. Following the announcement that morning the press had made it their business to discover, list, and publish names and addresses of all the victims. Midday papers had this information and all thirty-six Lanfranc families and those of Papa Mike’s crew were to receive letters of condolence from total strangers.

In Cunard Eagle’s Head Office, Harold Bamberg was still at his desk. He too wrote a letter of condolence, detailing what had happened, what they were doing to help, and that a full investigation into the accident would take place.

Friday 11th. AIB's Norman Head and Geoff Feltham, together with the RAF Pathologists, left with the Commission team very early from Sola. Accredited British Representatives, AIB's Inspectors were generally ex-pilots who dealt with witnesses and operational aspects whilst Investigating Officers examined the wreckage and handled the technical side of accidents. These two senior crash detectives were to add considerable experience and expertise to the Norwegian Commission.

They were flown by helicopter to the site. Surveying the difficult terrain the AIB men thought it unlikely that anyone would get there to plunder pieces as souvenirs. They had to now find and identify important parts to be retrieved and transported to Sola by the Sikorsky, – or a more powerful helicopter. Vital parts would be flown to Farnborough for examination.

Alighting at the foot of the steep cliff, they trudged up the rocky slope to the plateau summit, noting items of wreckage on their way. Solemnly they witnessed the burnt tail plane overhanging the cliff edge, with unburnt remains scattered on the cliff face. More unburnt items were mentally itemised on reaching the valley from whence they climbed rocky ledges to the plateau top. All were used to the aftermath of air crashes, Norman Head and Geoff Feltham particularly so, but none of them were prepared for this experience. Usually, by the time investigators arrived to inspect the wreckage, the bodies of victims had been taken away. Not this time. They couldn't be removed, either because they were integrally incorporated in the wreckage, or part of the scatter pattern, but each had to be mapped, numbered, and lettered. Head and Feltham, inured to the vicissitudes of their work, were shaken to see school uniforms all over the place. It was an appalling sight to witness not only the incinerated remains of Papa Mike, but its crew, and its 'payload' from a south London school... This investigation was exceptional and it was very hard for them to detach themselves emotionally on seeing so many dead youngsters from their own country especially as Norman Head had a 16 year old son himself. But they had to get down to work. Normally their job involved urgency and pressure, and they were used to banishing feelings in order to investigate in a relaxed state of mind, – but this day was different. They discovered they weren't at all thick-skinned. So many young lives! Norman Head had to banish the realisation that Captain Watts was from his own home town of Camberley and though

younger had survived similar wartime experiences. Geoff Feltham was shocked. Norway was the country where he'd met his wife on a skiing holiday and when they'd married they'd spent their honeymoon there. But this was so different! The Norwegians shared their grim feelings. Everyone worked hard to keep emotion in check. The fourteen or so men on the summit of Holtæheia felt chilled to the core and it wasn't just due to the cold wind that swept the heights of Strand that morning. Grim-faced, it was the start of a very, very, difficult day.

Newsmen from Britain and Norway had gathered again at the foot of the crag hoping for scraps of information and for their newspaper to be first to report *why* the crash had happened. The British journalists were pleased to network with the Norwegian reporters who, friendly and helpful, shared information. Patiently waiting were 21 Red Cross Hjelpekorps, three of them girls. Stretchers ready, they planned to bring the victims down once they had the go-ahead. The two pathologists, Squadron Leader P.J. Stevens and Flight Lieutenant S.W. Tarlton, joined the Norwegian Identification Commission's doctor and dentist, Professor. J. Lundevall and Professor Ferdinand Strøm, appointed by Rogaland's Chief Constable. As the innocent Hjelpekorps volunteers were soon to discover, ID experts were vital. Professional men, paid for this exacting work, would examine the wreckage and identify the victims, yet the unpaid Red Cross volunteers, barely older than the Lanfranc boys, had the worst job of all. This day would test their compassion, resolution, and inner strength, to the limit.

Mr. R.R.H. Aspden continued his investigation with a very heavy heart. It was his second time on the mountain where his colleagues were still lying. The funeral pyre of the Viking was bad enough but he couldn't face the victims... He pulled himself together. He'd noted more pieces of plane as he'd climbed up. Besides one of the wheels lying at the foot of the crag and wreckage jammed into the cliff face, a smashed engine teetered on a ledge below the summit. Wreckage was strewn in the valley behind the north-south aligned ridge including the other engine. On the plateau the shattered burnt out fuselage cranked eerily in windy updrafts. It was an anathema to see the ghost of Cunard Eagle's proud name and livery on the burnt, discoloured metal. Treading very carefully, he pencilled notes, concentrating hard on the job in hand, but capricious gusts whisked the pages of his notebook and his fingers were so cold

October

Monday 2nd. There was a frisson of anticipation at the Ministry. The Norwegians had demonstrated both cooperation and friendship, and with the Minister keen to make the trip to Sola several others hoped to be included. Plans were afoot to spirit the Minister out of London by helicopter from Battersea Heliport so that the press didn't discover his flight from Farnborough – by Comet! First they had to have permission from the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister, and the Queen. They didn't think this presented any difficulties. The date had to be firmed up and with his Ministerial duties Thorneycroft suggested a day between October 17th and 19th. CIA Tweedie wanted Norman Head to go because he had worked with the Norwegian investigators and was fully conversant with the accident. Telegrams between the Foreign Office and Oslo were to buzz back and forth.

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Inspector Michelsen had been deputed to collect further witness statements from commanders of aircraft that had used Sola Airport on the afternoon and evening of August 9th. He knew Braathens SAFE had landed much later and he contacted their Captain Ringdal to ascertain which pilot to interview. Captain Einar Danielson was non-plussed to be asked to recall what was to him a routine flight, almost two months previous. He was concerned that he wouldn't be able to submit a detailed enough report.

'I flew route BU 264, with departure from Sola at 1345 to Flesland. I cannot remember anything special from this flight, but I assume I would have remembered any irregularity with the ILS, radio beacons, etc.

I do, however, better remember the flight, RU 245, with departure from Kjevik approximately at 2100 hours, via Airways - 8 to Sola, because at that time we knew that the aircraft was missing. We flew a normal ILS approach and did not have any difficulties with the identification of either the ILS or the radio beacons. And all indications were normal.

It blew a strong south-west wind. (I do not remember the exact wind speed) with rather heavy rain showers. The visibility in the showers was moderate, and we had up to moderate turbulence during the approach. The cloud base was rather varying, but as we came in we could see the runway from ZO (Outer Marker), that means from 1200 – 1400 feet. The wind was gusty and we had drift up to 15 – 20 degrees during the approach.'

I regret that this is all with which I can assist you in this case. Einar Danielsen.

Wednesday 4th. Whilst telegrams between Britain and Norway continued refining arrangements for the Ministerial visit, more erudite business ensued. Inspector Michelsen translated the report from Captain Einar Danielson, and certified that it conformed in all respects, with the Norwegian version of the report. There was nothing outstanding in Danielsen's statement except that drift component of 15 to 20 degrees. He hoped that Captain Svend H. Waale would recall a lot more. He had requested a report from him, which would entail a further translation. Currently he had other work to do. Stavanger Air Traffic Control had given him G-AHPM's flight plan received from London Airport at 14:00 hours GMT on August 9th. He looked through the aviation codes and absorbed the information. The flight was Eagle 926; Viking was the type of aircraft; time of departure was 13:29 GMT; from London Airport. There was one error; G-AHPM which everyone now referred to as Papa Mike was incorrectly marked as G-AMPM – a small slip perhaps? He ran his eye down the list of data until he reached Stavanger/Sola and the estimated total time elapsed to the aerodrome of landing: 2 hours 30 minutes. Papa Mike had 5 hours and 15 minutes worth of fuel on board, they were equipped with the standard route frequencies, and their navigational and approach aids were ILS, VOR, and radio compass. Where there should have been a total number of persons on board this was missing. Slipshod again? The message only stated 'passengers plus a crew of 3'. Watts was given as the name of the pilot-in-command and Eagle as the identity of operator. There being nothing fundamentally wrong, John Michelsen certified that the departure plan was a true copy of the telegram received by Stavanger Air Traffic Control. The telegram did, however, give him cause to wonder at Cunard Eagle's Management, as the message was so brief. Rushed? Under pressure? Were they so *very* busy that they couldn't have sent a fuller message? Did it cost a lot extra to include that essential request? Grimacing, he wished that they had.

Not far away, at the British Embassy in Oslo, the Ambassador Sir John Walker got a surprise interruption during his afternoon tea and cake. A confidential message in Cypher/OTP arrived from the Foreign Office. Putting his tea cup down he scrutinised the cypher with his gimlet eye, searching for possible snags.

Invoking science may have quietened Gresham Cooke but another MP, Mr. Lipton immediately bowled a googly.

‘Would it not also be in the interests of safety if more and more people travelled by the nationalised airlines, whose safety standards are not exceeded by any airline in the world?’

‘No, Sir’ replied the Minister of Aviation, knowing full well this was a stab at Cunard Eagle and Derby Airlines. He answered:

‘Safety standards are precisely the same for both independent and nationalised airlines.’

There would have been murmurs at this for whilst safety standards might have been *precisely the same*, charter companies were *five times* more accident prone. It would have been pertinent to have asked the Minister of Aviation if he travelled by charter flight or scheduled national airlines? The answer was surely the latter. Thorneycroft had spoken at BIATA's annual dinner that month, saying cryptically, *‘The future of the Independents will lie with the strong’*.

The Operations Director of the independent airline company which was most on MP's minds, was quietly furious. Cunard Eagle's Maintenance staff had chased him to get AIB to return five Viking and Bristol engine manuals. Captain Sauvage knew Norman Head had ‘borrowed’ them for Stavanger. It was his chance to have a dig at a Ministry man who was altogether too prying. He wrote peremptorily, demanding their return.

Norman Head meanwhile was pondering problems. Sverre Hodne the ATC Officer at Sola had introduced new evidence, inducing serious discussions between himself and Michelsen. Both men were aware of their political directives and the need to produce a confident report. Head wrote:

‘I would be glad if you would let me know if you have decided to accept the new evidence of the Air Traffic Control Officer at Sola. If so we can now use the position of the aircraft overhead the aerodrome at 16:18:19 hrs as a datum for our reconstruction, however, I would like to point out that if the aircraft was over LEC at 16:12:30 hrs its ground speed for the 15nm to Sola was only 155 kt. About 20 kt less than one would expect with the prevailing wind. I would also like to know if you have seen the witnesses again. My interpretation of their evidence is that the aircraft flew in over Alsvick Klubben from the west and made good a track of about 105 degrees (magnetic) to the position of the crash. Perhaps you would be good enough to let me know if you agree with this.’

said the report placed blame on a crew navigational error – of 20 miles. That gagging ‘Blameworthiness’ impingement was uppermost in Warren’s mind. Now he had a more serious ‘bone’ to contest with Holsten. Someone in Oslo had talked. Or had the diplomatic bag taken a walk? But from where?

That day the families of the victims in Croydon learned that they would receive compensation. Solicitors acting on behalf of the parents had worked very hard to claim this from Cunard Eagle. Public sympathy and awareness had made it difficult for the airline company to wriggle out of paying, – as other airlines had in the past. It was a pitiful payment for a precious human life. All the money in the world could not have recompensed their loss. Their sons were priceless.

Wednesday 14th. Warren sent a telegram to Holsten:

FOR S. HOLSTEN FROM WARREN STOP EAGLES WEATHER MINIMA FOR STAVANGER RUNWAY 18 STOP R.V.R. 880 YARDS CLOUD HEIGHT 400 FEET STOP YOU MAY PREFER TO STATE IN APPROPRIATE PLACE IN REPORT THAT AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT THE WEATHER CONDITIONS AT STAVANGER WERE ABOVE THE OPERATOR’S MINIMA.

Her Majesty’s Stationery Office published, on behalf of the Ministry of Aviation, the Civil Aircraft Accident Report relating to Dakota G-AMSW. Priced at six shillings and sixpence, the lengthy report detailed the circumstances of the October 7th Derby Airways tragedy. Twelve witnesses had come forward and these twelve were *each* accorded a *full page*. Five members of the French Commission were listed under the name of the chief investigator M. Bellonte. Their names were printed under the final paragraph which read:

Cause of the Accident ‘The Commission is of the opinion that:- The accident was the result of a navigational error the origin of which it has not been possible to determine for lack of evidence.’

On Airways, via Toulouse rather than Carcassonne, the pilot had last radioed at 00:30:20 GMT, and should have landed at Perpignan one hour later. Two investigators from AIB had assisted the French enquiry, which had ruled out any structural failure to the aircraft, but could not rule out the possibilities of map confusion, unexpected strong winds, poor reception and possible radio failure. The pilots of the Dakota were not blamed. Other pilots who had flown into Perpignan Airport knew the difficulties... the navigational signals around Perpignan were very weak. The mind-set of the Ministry of Aviation was quite clear.

Monday 19th. Warren arrived at his office on Monday morning with a reply to write to the Mr. Pritchard. Every cloud reputedly has a silver lining and WWII pilot Pritchard could have been on to something. He'd discussed this possibility previously with Norman who had served in the RAF as a night fighter and now he'd thought about it again over the weekend. Visually it was difficult to determine an aircraft's height above ground. Did those small mountain huts resemble bigger houses? Did the low vegetation on the mountains look like taller trees? It was true that some maps of Norway did show spot heights in feet and others in metres and this could lead to misunderstandings when changing from one map to another. Serious consequences too. But did this apply to Papa Mike flying below the safety level to Holttaheia? He was in two minds. Officially he replied that misreading spot heights was *not* a contributory factor.

In the House of Commons, Peter Thorneycroft was facing awkward questions again, and for political reasons he took a firm stand. He was asked whether he would take steps to require all airline operators, flying aircraft over the United Kingdom, to provide third-party insurance in case of aircraft accidents. The Southall air crash of 1958, where people and property were involved on the ground, was a case raised, though the recent victims from Croydon and the Derby Airways crash were very much in mind. Insurance companies, through their 'small print', too often repudiated responsibility. Now some MPs felt that an assured third-party insurance for passengers, and those on the ground, needed to be legislated for. Thorneycroft, knowing the enormity of introducing such legislation, thought otherwise.

Had they known it, the victim's families in Croydon had fared better than most. The situation for air passengers who did not take out their own private travel insurance was iniquitous, especially when flying was still chancy.

Tuesday 27th. Taking a chance to move onwards and upwards, the first of Cunard Eagle's two new Boeing 707 jet aircraft was delivered.

March

Friday 9th. Sverre Holsten had been away for three weeks and was catching up. Writing to Warren, saying he was now in a position to send him two copies of what the Commission anticipated would be the final draft report on the accident to G-AHPM, he attached 6 Annexes which he hoped were suitable.

Asking for comments on the draft at his earliest convenience, Holsten requested that any specific amendments should be made to one copy, and swiftly returned. If, however, the draft was acceptable then a telex-message to him would speed things up. Then he digressed to impart some gossip:

‘Christie left for Paris 6th February and will stay there for about 6 months. Jørstad has got promotion and is now heading RNoAF’s Telecommunications Branch. Nyhus was not appointed Chief of Police in Oslo. Two new aeronautical experts have been appointed Permanent members of the Accident Commission.’

‘As to the remaining steps in the G-AHPM case I can say this. The letter of transmittal of the report to the Norwegian Ministry of Transport and Communications was formulated before Christie’s departure to Paris. As soon as the final report text is clear, we shall have to send it to him for signing. I estimate that we need about 10 more days from the date we get your comments to the report being received by the Ministry of Transport and Communications.’

Saying that he expected that the transmittal of the report from their Ministry of Transport and Communications, to Britain’s Ministry of Aviation, would be through their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that publication would be decided between these two ministries, he added that if there were any problems either Mr Bøe or himself could come to London to discuss them. Then Holsten turned to Warren’s letter which he’d received on February 14th.



‘We agree that the Daily Mail article on the report was most embarrassing and reveals that Mr. MacPherson has had access to sources in our closest vicinity. I have made efforts to investigate into the matter and can state that he has been in contact with one of the reporters in one of the major Oslo papers. However, I have not been able to trace Mr. MacPherson’s steps further. I hope we can discuss the matter at a later stage.’

Finally he thanked Warren for sending him details of Silver City Airways and their activities in the field of checking various radio aids, – which was most useful to them. Sending his best regards to Warren and to Mr. Head he signed



—THE— PAPA MIKE AIR CRASH MYSTERY

*A double volume of detailed
Investigation and Detection to solve
‘The Papa Mike Mystery’*



On August 9th, 1961, the worst peacetime tragedy to affect a British school at that time, happened when Viking G-AHPM, code name ‘Papa Mike’, crashed on Holtaheia mountain, near Stavanger in Norway. Two masters and 34 teenage boys from Croydon’s Lanfranc School, and three Cunard Eagle crew, lost their lives. In 50 years of civil aviation it was the worst air crash involving children.

Working with British AIB investigators, The Royal Norwegian Commission Civil Air Accident Report, concluded: *‘The cause of the accident was a deviation from the prescribed flight path for reasons unknown.’*

REASONS UNKNOWN? Relatives of the victims thought this a whitewash, whilst the Press deemed ‘The Papa Mike Air Crash’ a ‘Mystery’. Now British and Norwegian archives reveal the true account.

Book One, ‘The Investigation’, narrates the events of August 9th, the crash investigation and the political machinations that followed.

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ISBN 978-0-9531890-5-2