

SEP 27 1917

September 27 1917

Deliver To

WFL

Mr P W Litchfield
Vice-President.

Replying to your
letter 9-22-1917

I have received your criticism on the operation of the Goodyear Caquot type kite balloon on exhibition September 21st.

I note your statement "that the operation was a piece of rank carelessness". In the interest of co-operation, I am willing to personally shoulder this criticism and the blame to the fullest extent. You may consider your order to send a letter of censure to the ones responsible as completed inasmuch as you have personally sent such a letter to me and I naturally keenly felt your displeasure.

To eliminate any recurrence, I am issuing the following positive instructions:

1. No balloon will be taken from the hangar for any exhibition purposes except upon orders from yourself or the writer or in your absence, Wm Stephens or whom you designate, and wherever possible such orders shall be written orders.
2. No person will be permitted to ride in any balloons except for regular school and business purposes, except upon order of yourself or the writer or in your absence, Wm Stephens or whom you designate.
3. All winches will be kept locked as much as is necessary to assure the carrying out of the above instructions.
4. No person will be allowed to enter a balloon, unless he be a regular accepted pilot, without signing a release to the effect that he realizes that he is taking his own responsibility for any accidents incurred.
5. Where the above rules effect the military establishment now existing at the Lake, we will use our best judgment.
6. I have asked the Specifications Department, (Mr Finn and Mr Upson) to be responsible to check the production department to see that all valves and equipment are properly set before any ship leaves the hangar.

In investigating the case in question, I have consulted Messrs; Hockensmith, Supt., Pouchot, Pilot, Wm. Stephens, passenger, and Slusser, Passenger.

Answering your questions directly, "Who first ordered the balloon up and who operated the winch?" I will state that Mr Hockensmith gave the signal for starting and stopping, and that Mr Murphy was operating the winch.

Answering your third question, "Why was such careless operation allowed?", I can simply say that there was no deliberate carelessness tolerated. This balloon was sent up in exactly the same manner as all other balloons were during the day.

If you will inquire from Messrs: Pouchot, Wm. Stephens, or Blusser, you will receive their own statement that they do not consider that the ascension was handled irregularly in any way.

The history of the ascension briefly is this:

William Stephens wished to ascend in K-34 which was over on the platform and was busy. He then asked to go up in K43, the Goodyear Cagnot. Mr Hockensmith told him that he could not go up without an authorized pilot and called Mr Pouchot to the scene. Pouchot with his passengers climbed into the basket and the balloon was raised in exactly the same manner as all other balloons that I witnessed during the day. It was sent up to an altitude of approximately 1200 to 1500 ft. from the ground and was out of sight from the ground. It is true that all the spectators were joking Mr Stephens and the other occupants and this tended to give the appearance of a practical joke to the whole affair. Mr Hockensmith personally superintended the whole operation, stopping the kite when in his estimation he thought they had gone far enough, altho he could have let out several hundred more feet of cable. After the balloon had been in the air a reasonable length of time he ordered it down.

There has been some criticism that the valve was not properly set before the balloon left the hangar.

In answer, I may say that the valve was set, but whether properly or not, it is impossible to say as no one in the hangar knew positively exactly the proper procedure for setting this new type of valve, including the Specification Dept. men present. The valve was therefore set according to best judgment.

There were a great many Goodyear officials on the ground and if anyone realized that careless operation was going on, they were morally under obligation to advise us on the spot.

Because you have encouraged frank discussion from your subordinates, I wish to make the following statement.

Please do not consider this statement as coming from me in a spirit of insubordination.

In the interests of proper management and proper adherence to line organization I consider it entirely improper for you to receive a criticism from a man directly responsible to me without calling me into consultation before writing a letter of censure. From your own statement that "The action has been criticised severely by our own school officials", I am naturally led to believe that you refer to Mr Preston. I think that you appreciate that we have had sufficient difficulty in keeping our line organization in working harmony and anything like this naturally weakens my control of the situation. I have realized many times that Mr Preston has come to you instead of me with questions for discussion and I want you to know that I have been broad minded enough not to comment on this or to feel dissatisfied in any way. Mr Preston's knowledge of the balloon game is superior to mine and he should have access to you. I do not want you to think that I am having difficulty in getting along with Mr Preston or that I shall hold this act against him for all time to come. I shall simply tell him frankly that he should come to me with such questions and that if he then feels that I am not taking proper steps to correct matters, he should by all means take them up to some higher authority, namely you. Mr Preston or anyone else has never yet made a criticism involving life or death or dangerous ~~padding~~ ~~padding~~ but that I have quickly taken every possible step to correct the trouble. In other details not involving life or death, but involving production, I have been glad to accept his suggestions and as you know, have on my own initiative carried some of them to such an extreme that other officials have said that the hard and fast ironclad rules imposed at the Field are ridiculous.

Again referring to the question under discussion, I think that you can realize that neither Mr Hockensmith nor I feel in a position to dictate to Mr Stephens or yourself or other officials what they shall do in the matter of going up in a balloon, or any other action which they wish to take when they visit the Goodyear Flying Field. In my opinion the Flying Field has been used entirely too much as a place of exhibition. I would like to quote Mr Hockensmith's statement as it hits the nail exactly on the head and I agree with him entirely:

"As I expected, I have been criticised for the way the handling of the kite balloons has been carried on here. If the public visitors and the officials would realize the fact that it is dangerous to go up in those kites, and that every time they do so they are taking their life in their hands, perhaps there would be less dissatisfaction as to the way they have been handled. Sometime something may happen when it is least expected, for you cannot always expect to fly them without an accident. Already I have seen two rip panels blow out while the kites were being flown here at the Field".

I think that you will remember that many times I have protested, perhaps too mildly, against continued exhibition flights, photographic flights, etc. I have had enough experience with this sort of thing in the automobile game, which is very much easier to control, to know that it does not pay and it is absolutely not tolerated at the Peerless Organization. In fact, during one or two times that the established rules were improperly broken, I have known of two serious accidents to occur and one delay of a very important shipment. Every time a balloon is taken from the hangar there is danger that something will happen to it, and every time a person takes a trip in the air there is danger that something will happen to him.

My sincere request is that you will read this letter carefully, but not with the idea that I am narrow minded on the subject of criticism, on the subject of my relationship with Mr Preston, or on the subject of the management of the Flying Field. The Flying Field is a more difficult proposition to handle than most people realize and I consider that Mr Hoekensmith is doing well on the job. I do not care to censure him for this act, which if wrongly handled, in my opinion, could have been avoided by the people who knew on the spot instead of by bringing a post-mortem criticism.

I realize that what you want to drive home is to eliminate all the possibilities of death or accident and I want you to feel that we fully appreciate the seriousness of all the work that is being conducted at the Flying Field and appreciate it a great deal more than most of our visitors do.

Don Stevens

Copy to Geo. Hoekensmith
Supt. Flying Field.