

news from Britain



DART-HERALD APPEARS. This new Handley Page Herald, Rolls-Royce Dart combination made its maiden flight recently. Prototype was built in eight months.

Case for Mobile Missile Bases

By Oliver Stewart

Viewed in perspective, the conferences, official statements and broadcasts which marked the fortieth anniversary of the formation of the Royal Air Force by the fusion of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service, appear to be muddled and unconvincing. Their burden was that although the missile was in the ascendant, the manned aircraft would always be needed for air force duties and the man would always remain, in Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Dermot Boyle's words, "the force driving the RAF on to great achievements and responsibility."

Against this frankly optimistic view, there must be set the facts that less public money is to be spent on the air service in Britain, and that the Minister of Defence has repeated more than once his conclusion that the job of defending Britain must be handed over to the missile. Even while senior RAF officers were talking about the continued importance of manned aircraft, the new missile station in Lincolnshire was being completed. The Bristol Bloodhound ground-to-air missile was being made ready for service trials.

So the celebrations of the RAF's anniversary were regarded by the sceptics as a kind of funeral service. In the future there seems no doubt

that the RAF will become a branch of long-range artillery.

It is a gloomy prospect. There remains one and only one step whereby it could be made less gloomy: if the RAF were to forget about bombing and fighting and concentrate everything upon transport. If it were to turn itself into a great carrier service, learning how to transport in the most efficient manner all the material of both major and minor wars, it might stake a larger claim on public moneys and retain its aeronautical interests.

At the moment there is no sign of this bold move and Transport Command has only sixty-four large aircraft: 24 Beverleys, 10 Comets and 30 Hastings. It has 20 Britannia 250s on order. Its transportation abilities are therefore puny.

Trials are being made with the P1B fitted with a Napier Double Scorpion rocket motor in addition to its Avon jet engines. This represents an attempt to show that a fighter endowed with exceptional speed and climb performance, especially at altitude, is not yet made obsolete by guided missiles. The P1B will become a formidable missile launcher. It will be able to use its Mach 2-plus abilities to position itself for firing the de Havilland Firestreaks which it carries.

This was the argument put forward by Maurice Brennan, designer of the Saunders-Roe 177, when the future of that mixed power plant ma-

chine was being discussed.

It seems logical that a missile discharged from a mobile base must be superior in hitting power to one discharged from a static base. And the faster the launching vehicle the better. The value of mobility is one of the basic, unchanging lessons of war. But in Britain the authorities are so anxious to get rid of inhabited aircraft that they tend to forget that lesson.

Hopes For Herald

Among first passengers to sample the qualities of the Dart-engined Handley Page Herald branch liner, was Sir Frederick Handley Page himself. He told me he believed that the high wing arrangement would be much appreciated for an aircraft of this kind which might often be working on short and medium ranges.

Where an aircraft is used for long ranges, and takes off, climbs to a great height and cruises at that height, the passenger finds little interest in looking out of the windows. If the aircraft is a low wing machine, so that the view down is restricted, it matters little. But where the range worked is short, the unobstructed downward view has importance.

Perhaps something that will appeal more to operators than an unobstructed downward view, is the low loading line. The steps and lifts which have become part of all big airports, may not be available at the kind of airports where the Herald might be called on to work. So the low loading line is of great value.

As for the Rolls-Royce Dart engine, this should give the Herald a flying start over most other aircraft in the same category for there is no turbine in existence with as much civil operating experience as the Dart. It is by far the most fully developed turbine for civil transport in the world.

London-Moscow Service

The London-Moscow service which British European Airways are to open jointly with the Soviet Aeroflot will be welcomed. It will serve not only to advance aeronautical interest, but it may also help to break down mutual mistrust, a worthy aim for aviation. As I write there is still a certain amount of paper work to be done before the agreement can be brought into effect. But BEA do not expect serious difficulties.

BEA will start with a disadvantage because they will have nothing so fast as the Tu 104. When the Comets are delivered, however, there should be little to choose between the services offered by the British and the Russian operators.

TO BE A FACTOR IN CANADIAN POLICY