

London Letter

By OLIVER STEWART

Historical stutter

History is not so much repeating itself as stuttering when it comes to aviation priorities. The arrival at London airport in a Trans-Canada Super Constellation of J. A. D. McCurdy re-started all the arguments about who was the first man to fly. About Mr. McCurdy's own achievement there is, fortunately, no question. He was the first man in the British Empire to fly in a heavier-than-air machine. But immediately after he had arrived that distinguished French pioneer, Gabriel Voisin, who was building aircraft before the first world war, gave fresh impetus to an old controversy by an able and challenging discourse in Paris.

Mr. Voisin returns to the Ader versus Wright Brothers controversy and claims that "mechanical flight" was first achieved by Clément Ader in 1890. So forcefully has he put the argument that two French organizations are now trying to find the money to reconstruct a replica of Ader's aircraft so that they may see if it can be persuaded into the air.

Voisin admits that the idea of flying a "circular" course was wrong. But he says that there were trustworthy witnesses that Ader covered 80 metres (262 feet) at a height of a little less than one metre on the 9 October, 1890. About Ader's achievements as an engineer there is no sort of doubt. But his successful work was mostly in the electrical field. His "Eole" aircraft was an astonishing fine piece of work for its day. It had a 46 ft. wing span and weighed about 1,000 lb. Most remarkable was the 20 horsepower steam engine, a notable piece of craftsmanship for its day. Whatever happens with the Ader replica—if it is built—most people will still say that the Wright brothers should have all the credit for the first successful powered flight.

Turboprops go ahead

While the shadow of uncertainty still lay over the Comet there came, here in London,

in early June, a remarkable tribute to the work done in Britain with turboprop aircraft. It was the order for 3 Vickers Viscounts (4 Rolls-Royce Dart) placed by J. H. Carmichael, president of Capital Airlines with the option for a further 47. It will be the first time that a British turbine engine air liner has been operated by a United States domestic carrier. Just before this order Colonel Luis Calderon, president of the Venezuelan airline Linea Aeropostal Venezolana had said that his company was buying three Viscounts.

So the Viscount order book now goes well above the 100 mark and there are still more operators negotiating purchases. If Capital take up their option the order will be worth £16 million, while the Venezuelan order is worth £1,428,000. Thus the faith George Edwards has had in the straightforward air liner fitted with turboprop power units has been justified. Not a little of the success is due to the work Rolls-Royce have put in on the Dart. (This was described in "Canadian Aviation" for May, page 37). At one time the engine, with centrifugal compressor, was on the obsolescent list. Then it was discovered that it had valuable qualities which could be attributed to no other engine. So Rolls-Royce set in motion their famous development process. Darts were built by the dozen. Many were subjected to the fiercest tests. Things began to happen. The power went up. Overhaul periods went up. Fuel consumption went down. And now the Dart powers the most successful turbine air liner in the world.

These successes of the turboprop recall the fact that the Canadian built maritime reconnaissance Britannia aircraft are to have piston engines and not turbines. It is a choice probably dictated by other things than economics or engineering efficiency—delivery dates might have something to do with it for instance. But so far as Dr. A. E. Russell, designer of the

Britannia is concerned, the turboprop is the best kind of power unit for the large size transport aircraft or freighter.

In the 42nd Wilbur Wright Memorial Lecture before the Royal Aeronautical Society, delivered in London in latter part of May, Dr. Russell came down unequivocally on the side of the turboprop. He gave hosts of graphs, tables and diagrams to prove his point. He is not a believer in the turbojet and still less in the piston engine. He is not a believer in the ducted fan when compared with the turboprop. But he made a vigorous case in favor of the turboprop and I expect to see the details he gave quoted in many places in the near future. The Britannia as it is being built in Britain will have Bristol Proteus turboprops.

Saucers and all that

As they assemble the statements that come in from the world's press about Avro Canada's flying saucer, aviation writers in England wonder how much is truth and how much fiction. First we hear that A. V. Roe Canada dislike the name "flying saucer," but then we hear that the aircraft has some kind of rotating annulus which turns at one thousand revolutions a minute. Then we are told that the "span" of the aircraft is 40 ft. and that it has an undercarriage giving it a large ground incidence. We hear that it will be able to take off vertically and to land vertically.

I do think that I am unique among English aviation writers in having not the faintest idea what it is all about. That A. V. Roe Canada have advanced projects under way is obvious. So have all progressive aircraft companies. That there is some attempt to produce an Avro vertical take-off machine is equally obvious. But how many of the tit-bits of information are true, how many false? No doubt people in Canada are better informed on this than we are in England.

Self-packing 'chute

I referred in these notes to the disadvantages of the tail braking parachute. And I said that it would be a boon if a self-packing braking parachute were to prove possible. A few days ago I saw one demonstrated.

It was at Dunsford aerodrome, the Hawker aero-

drome, and the parachute was attached to the late John Cobb's Napier-Railton racing motorcar. I often saw that car on Brooklands track, where it was able to top 150 miles an hour and where it established a lap speed record which will always remain unbeaten.

Sir Raymond Quilter, head of the G Q Parachute company, drove the car. He took it up to the kind of speeds that are common for jet driven aircraft during the final approach, then released the parachute. It was a standard G Q slotted parachute of the same diameter (7 ft.) as is used in many jet fighters. It braked the car effectively and directly the speed had dropped to the equivalent of aircraft taxiing speed, the parachute was drawn back into its container by an electric winch.

Braking parachutes would be useful for both civil and military high speed jet driven aircraft. But neither civil airports nor military airfields can allow canopies to be jet-tisoned after use so that they have to be recovered by jeep. The self-packer seems to be the answer. Its only rival would be an effective jet deviator. Many are working on that; but so far there is always a power penalty. The Wright penalty of the self-packing parachute is said to be only about 10 lb.



A/V/M A. L. James

Air Vice Marshal A. L. James, who has retired as Air Officer Commanding of the Air Defense Command of the RCAF, joins the Board of the Bristol Aeroplane Company of Canada and of its affiliate, Bristol Aero Engines Ltd. on Sept. 1 and becomes vice-president engineering of the latter company. Air Vice Marshal James joined the RCAF in 1924 and has been chiefly responsible for setting up Canada's aerial home defenses.

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