

# IN PARLIAMENT

## Helicopters

MR. HARDIE, on April 14, asked the Under-Secretary of State for Air whether he had decided what further is to be done with regard to the helicopter experiments; whether he intended to cause patents to be taken out in foreign countries; and whether he was aware that, even if the helicopter could do what the inventor claims for it, such services are already being carried out with other methods?

Mr. Leach: In reply to the first part of the question, I have nothing to add to the reply given to the hon. and gallant member for Clitheroe (Capt. Brass) on March 6. As regards the second part, the Air Ministry do not propose to take out foreign patents at the public expense, but the inventor has been given permission to take out such patents if he wishes to do so. With regard to the third part of the question, a successful helicopter should combine a number of functions which cannot be combined in any other type of aircraft.

## R.A.F. Accidents

MR. B. SMITH asked the number of aeroplane crashes in the Royal Air Force from January 1, 1920, until March 31, 1924; how many officers and other ranks lost their lives in flying accidents in the force; and whether, in his opinion, sufficient care is exercised to prevent undue risk of accident and loss of life?

Mr. Leach: As regards the first part of the question, the flying accidents resulting in death numbered 120, and those resulting in injury only, 162. These figures include all accidents, whether in this country or overseas, and whether occurring in the course of operation or otherwise. As regards the second part, 128 officers, 1 cadet and 55 airmen were killed in the 120 fatal accidents. As regards the last part of the question, I am satisfied that every care is taken to eliminate risk of accident and loss of life so far as this is possible.

## Civil Aviation Accidents

MR. B. SMITH asked the number of aeroplane crashes in civil aviation from January 1, 1920, till March 31, 1924; how many passengers, pilots and mechanics lost their lives; and whether, in the interest of public safety, it is proposed to introduce legislation providing for enquiry by a Government inspector in all cases where there is loss of life or injury following accidents when flying, as is done in the case of railway accidents?

Mr. Leach: On the assumption that by "aeroplane crashes" my hon. friend refers to British civil aviation accidents which resulted in death or injury to the occupants of the aircraft, the statistics for the period January 1, 1920, to March 31, 1924, are as follow:—

### Crashes.

Fatal (a), 3; (b) 12. Non-fatal, but resulting in injury, (a) 4; (b) 19.

### Casualties.

Killed—Pilots, (a) 4; (b) 12. Mechanics and other crew, (a) 2; (b) 1.

Passengers, (a) 5; (b) 11.

Injured—Pilots, (a) 2; (b) 16. Mechanics, etc., (a) 2; (b) 1. Passengers, (a) 3; (b) 13.

(a) = On regular air transport routes and transport services.

(b) = In all other civil flying, including "joy-riding," competitions, tests, exhibitions, etc.

In answer to the last part of the question, in accordance with the powers given by Section 12 of the Air Navigation Act, 1920, to make regulations providing for the investigation of air navigation accidents, the Secretary of State for Air made, on June 28, 1922, the Air Navigation (Investigation of Accidents) Regulations.

## R.A.F. Accidents

MR. A. T. DAVIES, on April 16, asked the Under-Secretary of State for Air whether his attention has been directed to the relatively increasing number of aeroplane accidents in the Royal Air Force during the past year; whether he is aware that the number of accidents to aeroplanes engaged in civil aviation over that period for miles flown is much smaller than those which have occurred in the Royal Air Force during a similar period; whether the Ministry has had under consideration for the purposes of report the cause of accidents to aeroplanes engaged both in the Royal Air Force and in civil aviation; whether he is aware that investigation tends to show that an appreciable and greater number of accidents in the Royal Air Force have occurred through the inexperience of their pilots contrasted with those employed in civil aviation; and that this has been proved by the faulty running of the Royal Air Force engines, and what was the number of accidents, lives lost and men injured in the Royal Air Force during the year ending March 31 last?

Mr. Leach: As regards the first part of the question, it is not the case that the number of aeroplane accidents in the Royal Air Force has been relatively increasing during the past year. On the contrary, the number of fatal or serious accidents has largely decreased relatively to the number of hours flown.

As regards the second part of the question, it is not possible to institute a comparison between Royal Air Force and civil flying on a basis of miles flown, the basis on which flying is computed in the Royal Air Force being one of hours and not of miles. A comparison on the basis of miles flown would in any case be quite misleading, since accidents are much less likely to occur as the result of the comparatively small number of long and straight flights carried out for the purposes of commercial transport than as the result of the very large number of shorter flights carried out by service aviators in training or manoeuvres.

As regards the third part of the question, every serious flying accident and all accidents of which the causes are in any way obscure, whether happening to Royal Air Force or civil aircraft, are investigated by the Accidents Investigation Branch, which directs special attention to ascertaining the causes and makes a report on which action is taken to prevent the recurrence of accidents from the same causes in future. In the case of Royal Air Force flying accidents, a Service Court of Inquiry is held in addition.

As regards the fourth part of the question, I am not aware on what evidence the statement made is based, but it is obvious that when inexperienced pilots are being taught to fly the risk of accident is greater than when experienced pilots are flying standard machines on commercial flights over well-known routes. Practically every pilot employed in civil aviation at present was trained by Service aviation.

As regards the fifth part of the question, the engines of Royal Air Force aeroplanes are subject to continual overhauls and tests by experienced mechanics under the supervision of technical officers, and only a very small proportion of the accidents which have occurred have been found to be due to engine failure.

As regards the sixth part of the question, the number of serious flying accidents in the Royal Air Force during the year ending March 31, 1924, was 87, resulting in 55 deaths and injuries to 87 officers and airmen.

## Air Ministry

LIEUT.-COLONEL MOORE-BRABAZON asked the Under-Secretary of State for Air whether he is aware that, owing to the action of the permanent members of the staff side of the Departmental Whitley Council, the temporary staff in the Department is not represented on the Council, and, as a result of this action, the temporary staff are practically disenfranchised for Whitley Council purposes; and, if the official side is not prepared to insist on the inclusion of the representatives of the temporary staff, whether he will set up separate machinery by which the temporary staff may raise matters concerning their terms of service, etc.?

Mr. Leach: In answer to the first part of the question, it is unfortunately true that a portion of the temporary staff is not at present represented upon the Departmental Whitley Council, owing to its being organised in an association which excludes certain members of the grades which it purports to represent.

As regards the second part of the question, the matter is one primarily for the staff side to settle, and I understand that it is now in a fair way to be adjusted; the suggestion for separate machinery has been considered, and could not be agreed to.

Lieut.-Colonel Moore-Brabazon asked the Under-Secretary of State for Air whether he is aware that many temporary officers in his department are compelled to accept liability for flying duties without any extra pay or emoluments; and whether, in view of the fact that flying risk necessitates a large addition to insurance premiums, he will undertake to investigate the position with a view to granting special allowances in every case where an officer is liable to undertake flying duties?

Mr. Leach: As regards the first part of the question, I am aware that the duties of the officials of the Research and Inspection Departments necessitate their going into the air, but this liability was taken into account when their emoluments were fixed, and is expressly mentioned in their contract of service as entitling them to no additional allowance. As regards the second part of the question, I cannot undertake to grant a special allowance for a liability which is thus part of the contract of service, and which, moreover, is already covered to the extent that compensation is granted under the Superannuation Act, 1887, in the event of death or injury from a flying accident on duty.

## Air Armaments

MAJOR-GENERAL SEELY asked whether the Prime Minister could see his way to take some steps towards the limitation of air armaments, to stop the mad race which was now beginning, and which, if not stopped, would result in a catastrophe to civilisation the like of which mankind had never seen.

We had started an air race against France which was being joined in by others. Great armaments tended to make great antagonisms. He believed that there was no more humane way of maintaining order among savage tribes than the aeroplane, because the use of air power was generally for dropping warnings, which were only in rare cases followed by dropping bombs. But in the case of civilised countries air warfare was the most cruel and deadly ever devised. He appealed to the House to face the facts, and try to follow up the suggestion of the late Prime Minister—or, rather, he was glad to say, the ex-Prime Minister. It was said that they could not limit air armaments, because civil aviation provided a large reserve of war machines which no one would know anything about. The answer to that was that the vast expansion of civil flying which was prophesied had not come, and would not come, till aeroplanes were far different from what they now were.

If they came to an agreement in this matter, as they had in regard to the Navy at Washington, surely they might trust to frank disclosure of the facts. He suggested the desirability of summoning a conference of all the Powers concerned, or even of only two. In that way both England and France might be equally safe, and far richer, not only in money, but in the good will between the two countries.

Lieut.-Commander Kenworthy said that Major-General Seely did not speak for every one behind him in what he had said about the humane methods of air attacks on savages.

Mr. MacDonald, Prime Minister, said: We have listened to a very interesting speech by my hon. and gallant friend, and I can assure him that if I can do anything to help in any way to make it an important speech I shall be very glad.

I have at the back of my mind—and not very far at the back—the intention that, as soon as we clear away some of the present difficulties of Europe, we must face quite seriously this question of armaments—not only air armaments, but all other forms. I do not know how far my hon. and gallant friend has been "talking from the book," but if I felt that there was the least chance of receiving a welcome should I make such a proposal as he has indicated, I am prepared to do it. I will put it in another way, and I am quite sure that the House is with me in this—that if any invitation is extended to me by any other Power to help in bringing about such an arrangement, my door is open.

It is of the greatest importance that there should be no reason for misunderstanding—not merely no reason for a quarrel, but no reason for misunderstanding between France and ourselves. But, as my hon. and gallant friend knows, there are other Powers that are taking steps in this unfortunate air race that has already begun, and I think it would be far better if we could manage to get a sort of Washington Agreement—not merely a bi-lateral but a multi-lateral, agreement—so that every one should feel some measure of security.

The great problem of disarmament is not good will. It is the problem of security, and security is mainly a psychological problem. If we cannot persuade people they are secure then they would not feel secure, and you can persuade people they are secure when, as a matter of fact, they are taking steps to smash up any security they might have. Therefore, what the poor diplomatist has got to do is not only to meet public opinion, but to meet a similar body of sane men who really know what the real problem of security is, and get them—representatives of every nation concerned—to take wise steps and to explain those steps to their own people so that there will be an international feeling of security which will open the door to the arrangements that my right hon. and gallant friend has sketched. I do not think I need say anything more. It is a matter that has to be considered in details. Inquiries will have to be made. But he knows all that even better than I do.

All I can say, and I say it without reserve, with all my heart, is that I am exceedingly obliged to him for having opened up this question today, and so far as I am concerned, it will be a great pleasure if I can carry on the idea of—I am very glad to say, not "the late" Prime Minister I will do my best to keep him "ex" as long as I can—but I would never lift my little finger to make him "the late" Prime Minister, and it will be a great pleasure to me if I am assured of the hearty co-operation of all sections of the House in doing something to advance the intentions which prompted my right hon. and gallant friend in making his speech.