FLIGHT

AVIATION IN 1924

GENERALLY speaking the past year has not, with one or two exceptions, produced anything particularly noteworthy as far as aviation is concerned. Yet, on the whole, it has not been an altogether unsatisfactory one for British aviation. As we remarked in our leading article last week, 1924 has in the main been a year devoted to "spade work" and the planning of new schemes, all of which has, we think, tended considerably to strengthen the foundations of aviation and to stabilise aerial transport as a whole.

The Labour Government, which held the reins of office at the commencement of the year, made but little change in the air policy laid down by its predecessors, and was responsible for some good work in the advancement of aviation, to which we will refer later. Service aviation saw a continuation of the necessary expansion and re-equipment of the R.A.F., and with the advent of the present, Mr. Baldwin's, Ministry the good work is still proceeding with even, we hope, increased vigour. The very important question of Home Defence (Air) progressed further and made a good start during the year.

The value of aircraft in "small wars" was very strikingly emphasised on two occasions during the year. The first comprised a lengthy despatch from Air Vice-Marshal Sir J. M. Salmond, describing some successful operations carried out in Kurdistan against the pro-Turk intrigues of Shaikh Mahmoud, which was published in a supplement to the *London Gazette* for June 10. In this despatch Sir John made special reference to the important part played by aircraft, but we have not the space here to give the full details, and can only record that the work done by aircraft was extraordinary—they not only carried out offensive operations but dropped proclamations, carried supplies and messages, provided a rapid means of transport between important positions, and last but not least conveyed sick and wounded from hostile areas. For full details of these operations we would refer our readers to the report on same which we published in FLIGHT for June 19, 1924.

The other occasion was the publication of a note, signed by Lord Thomson, presented to Parliament, which described the method of employment of the Air Arm in Iraq. Here again we cannot go into details (*see* FLIGHT for August 14, 1924), but we may say that the effectiveness of air control under conditions obtaining in such countries as Iraq was clearly demonstrated in this Note.

A propos of the above it may be recorded here that Lord Thomson—who, during his term of office as Air Minister, displayed considerable interest and energy in aviation matters—made a tour of the Middle East in September and October, during which he covered 2,500 miles by air, and was thus able to inspect the principal air centres in Northern Iraq, Palestine and Egypt within the space of eight days.

While dealing with Service Aviation it may be of interest to note that for the first time in the history of the British Navy aircraft played an important part in the review of the Fleet by H.M. The King at Spithead, on July 27, 1924. They not only escorted the Royal Yacht, but had a place of honour among the 200 odd warships lined up.

Perhaps the most important action on the part of the Government concerning aviation, embracing both the Military and the Civil side, was the decision given in May as regards its airship policy. While the Government rejected the Burney scheme put forward by the Airship Guarantee Company, they agreed to a modified scheme, which was in effect to include the construction of two new airships and a comprehensive programme of lighter-than-air research and experiment—one of the existing airships being reconditioned for the latter work.

One of the new airships was to be built by the Air Ministry, and the second ship to be built, under contract, by the Airship Guarantee Company. Both airships were to have a capacity of 5,000,000 cu. ft. Included in the contract was a clause under which the Airship Guarantee Company would be permitted to re-purchase the airship from the Air Ministry at a reduced figure, on completion of satisfactory flying trials, provided that it is to be operated in connection with an approved British commercial airship service, and that it shall be available for use by the State if required.

It was further proposed that the Air Ministry should undertake the construction of a terminal and an intermediate base overseas, with the necessary facilities to enable these two airships to be operated with safety between England and India. It was estimated that, allowing for the re-purchase of the second airship by its constructors, the net expenditure involved over a three years' programme would not exceed £1,200,000. A start was made on this scheme towards the end of the year, and work was commenced on the two 5,000,000 cub. ft. ships—the Air Ministry one at Cardington and the Civilian vessel of the Airship Guarantee Company (an associated company of Vickers, Ltd.) at Howden, while R.33 was got in readiness for elaborate full-scale experiments.

In connection with this Airship scheme Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker, our energetic Director of Civil Aviation—who, by the way, appeared to spend the greater part of 1924 in the air, flying from place to place attending to various important air matters—commenced a protracted aerial tour to India at the end of November, being piloted by the famous air-taxi pilot Alan Cobham in the equally famous "D.H.50" biplane (Siddeley "Puma"). The purpose of this tour—which is still in progress—is, firstly, to survey the aerial possibilities of a route to India, with aeroplane feeder services *en route*, and secondly, on arrival in India Sir Sefton will be able to attend the conference with the Indian Government, to be held this month, dealing with the various matters connected with the airship service to India. Incidentally, it was also Sir Sefton's intention during this tour to study very closely possible new air routes over which Imperial Airways, Ltd., may extend their services.

Before leaving the subject of Airships it may be as well, perhaps, if we refer to other happenings in this connection that took place during 1924. The most important was undoubtedly the crossing of the Atlantic by the Zeppelin airship "Z.R.3," constructed at Friedrichshafen for the U.S. Government under the Versailles Treaty. The "Z.R.3" was completed towards the end of summer, and made its first trial flight on August 27, 1924. Then, after one or two false starts a few days previously, it set out on its journey from Friedrichshafen to America on October 12. Capt. Eckner, the well-known Zeppelin pilot, was in command, and with him was Capt. Steel and three American experts representing America. The ship rose at 6 a.m., and flying *via* Basel and the Bay of Biscay, it passed over Horta, Azores, early the following afternoon. Some time after thick fog was encountered, and they wirelessed a message asking for compass bearings. They then turned north for better weather conditions, and in the early hours of Tuesday morning, October 14, once again struck heavy weather, against which they battled all day. However, shortly before midnight they American coast was sighted, off the southern portion of Nova Scotia, after which good progress was made to Lakehurst, N.J., *via* Boston and New York. The "Z.R.3" landed at Lakehurst at 9.55 a.m. (3 p.m. G.M.T.) on October 15, having taken 80 hours 45 mins. to cover 5,000 miles.

Just about this time another big airship flight was accomplished. On October 7 the American-built Zeppelin, "ZR1" or "Shenandoah," manned by a crew of 37 under the command of Commander Lansdowne, and filled with helium gas, left Lakehurst for a test flight of 7,000 miles to the Pacific coast and back. Passing over Carolina, Georgia and Atlanta, the "Shenandoah" arrived at Fort Worth, Texas, at 7.25 p.m. on October 8, and was moored for the night. Continuing the next day, heavy weather was encountered in the night, and the airship narrowly escaped disaster when flying over the Rocky Mountains. The Pacific coast, at San Diego, was, however, reached at 10.28 p.m., October 10, and the airship safely moored.

After 12 days' stay at the mooring mast at San Diego, the "Shenandoah" set out on the return journey, and after cruising the whole length of the Pacific coast and back, arrived safely at Lakehurst in the early hours of October 25. During this test the "Shenandoah" completed about 9,000 miles in 18 days, encountered all sorts of weather, and made five landings—mostly with the aid of mooring masts. By this flight much valuable information was gathered and the possibilities of airship transport demonstrated under practical conditions.

The "Shenandoah," it may be recorded here, experienced a remarkable adventure early in the year, when, on January 16, a 50 m.p.h. gale sprang up while the airship was moored to the mast at Lakehurst. First, the cover of the upper fin was ripped open, and then the mooring tube was wrenched clean out of its reinforcing girders, causing the airship to break away from the mast, leaving behind on the latter the nose cap and a length of the axial cable. The first two gas bags were deflated by the breaking of the axial cable, but no further damage was done. Two minutes after the break