

The Outlook

A Running Commentary on Air Topics

An Honour Deserved

THE grant of an O.B.E. to Flt. Lt. W. R. May, D.F.C., of the Royal Canadian Air Force, recalls one of the most dramatic incidents of the great war. On his first flight across the lines on April 21, 1918, May, then a second lieutenant in No. 209 Squadron, R.A.F., was almost killed by Baron von Richthofen, and, in fact, would almost certainly have fallen a victim had not Capt. Roy Brown, D.S.C., his Flight Commander, shot the German leader dead at the critical moment.

No. 209 Squadron, flying "Camels," had engaged some fifteen Fokker triplanes and Albatros scouts led by von Richthofen in person. Two of the Fokkers had been shot down when May found himself clear of the dog-fight, but with the red triplane of Manfred von Richthofen close on his tail. May dived down almost to the ground, kicking his rudder bar to prevent his enemy from getting his sights on, and Richthofen closely followed each of his turns, waiting for his chance. Capt. Brown dived to the help of May—who, incidentally, had been at school with him at Edmonton, Alberta—and just in time got in a burst of fire from behind the red triplane. One of the bullets hit Richthofen on the right side (he seems to have turned in his seat to see the danger behind) and passed through his body, killing him instantaneously. The triplane dived into the ground behind the British lines. The incident was witnessed at close quarters by Lt. (now Sqd. Ldr.) F. J. W. Mellersh, of the same squadron, who had been chased down by two other German machines. Brown then drove those two off (after seeing their great leader killed they had no more heart for fighting), and Brown, Mellersh and May returned to their aerodrome together. The dog-fight lasted about twenty minutes, and the only British casualty was one pilot wounded.

Since then, May (familarly known as "Wop" May) has done fine work in Canada. A few years ago he was awarded the Transcontinental Trophy as the Canadian pilot who had done the best work in civil flying during the year.

Instrument Operation

AEROPLANES operating on scheduled air lines, both internal and international, nowadays habitually take off in bad weather, when the visibility is only a very few yards—far less than would have been considered practicable only a very few years ago. This necessitates flying from the start of the take-off run almost entirely by instruments.

Up to the present, British practice has been to operate special navigation instruments, such as gyroscopic turn indicators, by means of a venturi tube placed outside the aircraft. This system was discarded in America and other countries quite a long time ago. The venturi is an excrescence, and therefore produces drag and decreases speed, and it is also susceptible to ice formation and stoppage from other reasons.

What, however, is perhaps even more important is the fact that the aeroplane must have attained flying speed for quite an appreciable time before the instrument functions satisfactorily. When used, as it was some years ago, for flying through clouds—that is, when the machine had taken off and climbed up to a cloud layer under conditions which did not require the immediate use of the instrument—this slow-starting drawback was not of much

account, but its elimination is now becoming very important indeed. The system generally adopted in America is of working the instruments from a chamber kept in a state of vacuum by the suction from the engine induction system. One or two British aircraft have already been fitted in this manner, and it is to be hoped that something of the sort will become a standard practice before very long.

Other Excrescences

THE removal of venturi tubes is undoubtedly a help in cleaning-up an aeroplane externally, but there are other similar "bits and pieces" which in foreign countries have been streamlined or put inside the machine, but which are often found outside on British commercial aircraft. There is the electrical generator for wireless and general lighting purposes. It is true that some English manufacturers are incorporating drives for this particular piece of equipment behind their engines, but far too often we find the old-fashioned wind-driven type.

Wing-tip flares and landing lights are also capable of modernisation. The former can fairly easily be designed so that they retract cleanly into the bottom surface of the wing, while the latter can be placed in the leading edge of the wing behind a transparent panel conforming to the surface of the wing. Tail skids as well, although perhaps not quite so important, can be made retractable without very great difficulty.

An Opening

THERE appears to be a new opportunity for young men in the aviation industry, and it lies in a combination of the jobs of ground engineer and wireless operator. There is a rapidly increasing number of private owners of comparatively large aircraft, most of whom employ a pilot and many also carry their own ground engineer. It would make the pilot's job easier, and at the same time keep the ground engineer occupied while in the air, if the latter were also a fully qualified wireless operator.

Owners of this type of aeroplane generally want to go far afield in the world, and wireless equipment is therefore almost essential. Hitherto the pilot has done the operation, but where he also has the navigation to do he could very profitably be relieved of the wireless.

Why Not Models?

MANY years' attendance at flying club functions has made the sight of silver cups almost painfully familiar. Sometimes these trophies are things of beauty, sometimes not: in both cases, however, they often become white elephants for the recipients, whose wives do not look kindly on the idea of loading the sideboard with them. In fact, we have often heard the remark: "I don't know what I am going to do with the darned thing."

Why is it that donors of these trophies show so little originality? Why don't they, for example, give one of the really beautiful silver aircraft models which can now be obtained?