

# Britain's Test Pilots

No. 8

CHARLES K. TURNER-HUGHES



"Flight" photograph.

**K**NOWN throughout the aircraft industry as "T-H," Turner-Hughes has had a very varied career and is, in addition to his ability as a test pilot, a past-master at aerobatics. His flying hourage exceeds 6,800 and his log books show 162 different types.

Taking a short-service commission in the R.A.F., he learnt to fly at No. 5 Flying Training School on Avro 504 Ks and Sopwith Snipes. The Snipe was the last aircraft to go into service with a rotary engine. On qualifying for his wings, he was posted to the famous No. 56 Squadron, which has such a wonderful record both in the 1914-18 and in the recent campaign. Here he flew Gloster Grebes and later Siskin IIIs. This was his first introduction to the Siddeley Group aircraft, and the Siskin was the earliest all-metal fighter to go into service with the R.A.F.

His next move, in 1930, was to No. 24 (Communications) Squadron (which can be considered as the beginnings of Transport Command) where he flew such exciting types as Moths, IIIFs and Wapitis. When the late Ramsay MacDonald, then Prime Minister, was flown by No. 24 Squadron to visit Hindenburg in Berlin, he wore a seat-type parachute over a Sidcot suit and sat in the open cockpit of a Wapiti. Things are different for V.I.P.s to-day. Turner-Hughes did not pilot the Premier, but flew his personal assistant.

In 1931, when his commission came to an end, he came out of the Service and joined Caribbean Airways in Jamaica. This airline company had a Moth, a Fairchild on floats, and a Vickers H-boat. This latter was very like the Walrus, but had an American 400 h.p. Liberty engine which was a remnant left over from the 1914-18 war. After six months of this work he returned to England and joined the Cobham air circus. This travelling air display

and joy-riding concern was, I suppose, the biggest of its kind in the world. Charles stayed with it for two seasons. His share of the show was aerobatic and low inverted flying on a Tiger Moth. For six shows a day, Sundays included, he was paid £25 per week. This was later increased to £30.

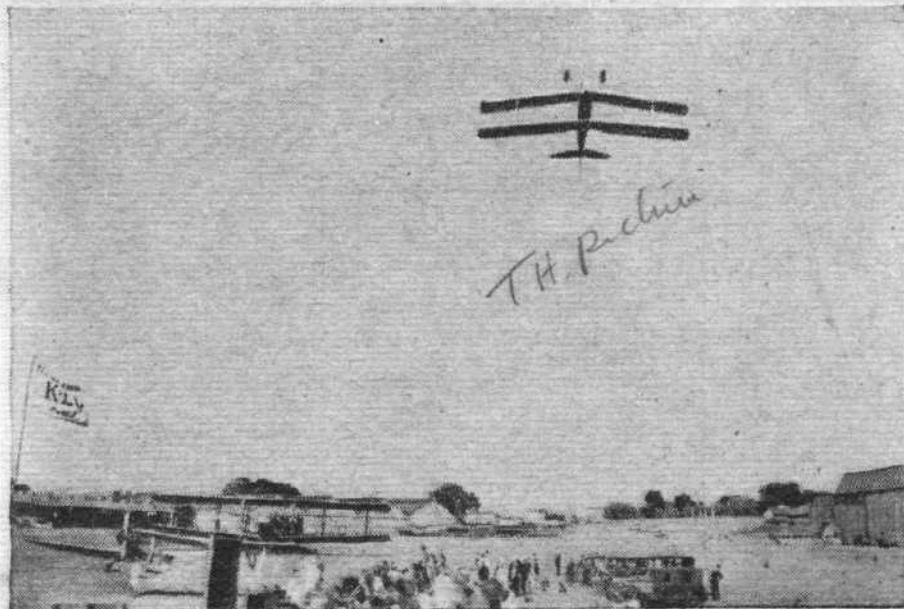
Having had a sufficiency of barnstorming, Turner-Hughes then turned to more serious flying, becoming No. 2 test pilot to Campbell-Orde at Armstrong Whitworths, and in 1936 became chief test pilot. This post he has held for ten years until he gave it up a fortnight ago. His first prototype was the A. W. Scimitar, a single-seat fighter, and all A. W. types from this, right up to the 52-G flying-wing glider, were his responsibility.

### Deadstick Landing

The Ensign (span 123ft, weight 48,500 lb) is the biggest aircraft he had to handle, and this was also his first experience of flying a four-engined type. On its fourth test flight T.-H. had a sticky passage. He had intended to stay up some 2½ hr on some sound-proofing trials. At the end of one hour, however, first one engine stopped, to be followed quickly by the other three. This was at 7,000ft, and he had a load of technical men on board. Finding himself in the Oxford area and within gliding distance of Bicester airfield, he put down the wheels and made a four-dead-sticks landing without breaking anything. This was entirely against regulations because if by a slight misjudgment he had not got into Bicester a wheels-down crash landing would have wrecked the whole machine, whereas usually a belly landing does local damage only.

Eric Greenwood, who was then Turner-Hughes' second in command, and is now chief test pilot of Glosters, was flying with him at the time. The trouble had been caused by the aircraft running all four engines off one tank instead of two. Since the fuel cocks were some 20ft away from the pilot's seat it was impossible to check them.

He also had a "shaky do" on the original prototype Whitley. On the first flights there had been considerable trouble with the elevator becoming very stiff during turns, and a universal joint was fitted in the centre of the elevator spar. This was made of dural, and after a few flying hours it showed wear, and at speed caused most terrific elevator flutter; so much so that on this occasion, while doing level speeds, T.-H. found himself nitting the roof in the violent undulations. He told his observer to jump, but



**FORTY TWO TIMES A WEEK:** For two seasons Turner-Hughes did inverted flying for Cobham's air circus six times a day, seven days a week.