THE AMSTERDAM-BATAVIA FLIGHT

Mijnheer van der Hoop Tells of His Experiences

On Wednesday, May 13, Mijnheer van der Hoop read, before a general meeting of the Royal Aeronautical Society, the Society of Arts and the Anglo-Batavian Society, a paper on his great flight from Amsterdam to Batavia in October-November, 1924.

Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes was in the chair, and, in introducing the lecturer, he said that at the beginning of the war Mr. Van der Hoop was a student at the University of Amsterdam. After leaving the University, Mr. Van der Hoop interested himself in flying and became a pilot. He referred to the old days when the broom and the whip were significant signs in the relations of Holland and England, and said he was very glad that today the air was bringing the nations together. This was particularly so with Holland and England. Sir Frederick referred to the Elta Show in 1919, when he, with a number of British officers, visited Amsterdam in five flying-boats and was received with every kindness by the Dutch. He also recalled the very valuable help given to Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith in the Dutch East Indies, during their flight from London to Australia.

The Chairman then called upon Mijnheer van der Hoop to read his paper.

The famous Dutch pilot had not spoken for more than a few minutes before it became evident that he felt quite at home in the English language, and later on this fact was brought out even more clearly when he came to give explanations of the various lantern slides shown. Except for a very slight accent, Mijnheer van der Hoop spoke perfectly, and it was quite enjoyable to listen to his humorous references to incidents which at the time they happened, must have been far from amusing.

The first part of the paper was devoted to a brief reference to the great flights of 1924, and the lecturer acknowledged the fact that it was certainly Sir Ross Smith who gave the initial start by his famous flight from England to Australia. Shortly after the War, plans began to be formed in Holland for a flight to the Dutch East Indies, and the Dutch East Indian Government offered a prize for the first Dutch crew to succeed in flying to the Indian possessions. Various schemes were put up, some of which had a very good chance of success, but they all had to be abandoned owing to lack of financial help and also to various political difficulties.

The lecturer pointed out that in the meantime Dutch Air traffic developed gradually in spite of unfavourable economical conditions. A brief reference was then made to the various types of Fokker machines, from the first of these to be used by the K.L.M., the F.II, which was a four-passenger machine, and up to the F.V, which had a Rolls-Royce engine of 360 h.p., and was designed to carry six passengers. In the opinion of Fokker himself this latter would be a suitable type for use on the air line between Holland and the Indies, and the idea of a flight to Batavia was again revived. A committee was formed in the beginning of 1923 to go into the question in detail. The Chairman of this Committee was General Snyders, ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch Military and Naval Forces. The Committee was faced with many difficulties, one of the most serious being the withdrawal of the Dutch Government's offer of financial support. It was also found, the lecturer said, that the F.V machine was not quite so suitable as had been expected. In the meantime Fokker had designed an improved type, the F.VII, but this machine could not be got ready and thoroughly tested before April 1, 1924, the date which had previously been fixed for departure. It was therefore decided to postpone the flight until October, 1924, at which date the F.VII might be expected to have passed all her tests. It was necessary to fix the start either for the first April or October 1, owing to the atmospheric conditions in India.

The F.VII machine was finished in the early spring of 1924, and was used by the K.L.M. on the Amsterdam-London air line for two months, during which time it flew some 120 hours on this route, piloted by Flight-Lieutenant Poelman and the lecturer, so that they had an opportunity of becoming thoroughly conversant with the machine. The lecturer then gave a a description of the machine, but as the F.VII is already familiar to readers of Flight, it is scarcely necessary to go into details here. During the month of September the machine was taken off the Amsterdam-London service and made ready for the great flight. A new Rolls-Royce engine was fitted which had been tested for 20 hours. The tank capacity was increased from the normal of 180 gallons to 220 gallons, which was sufficient for a non-stop flight of 10½ hours.

Mijnheer van der Hoop then referred to the difficulty which has confronted all who have ever attempted long-distance flights; *i.e.*, that of over-loading. The maximum weight in Europe for the F.VII was 7,600 lbs. In the warmer climates of the East, however, it would, of course, be considerably less, and this was naturally a very serious consideration. The increase in tank capacity caused a considerable amount of extra weight, and a large amount of spare parts, tools, etc., also had to be carried. After carefully going into the matter, the K.L.M. technical staff succeeded, by keeping everything not absolutely essential down to a minimum, in getting the total weight of the machine, with full tanks, down to 7,200 lbs. Thus with this relatively small weight good starts could be made from even fairly bad grounds. The lecturer referred to the fitting of wireless on the machine while it was in use on the London-Amsterdam line, and said that it gave excellent results, but as no very great use could be made of it during the flight to India they reluctantly decided to remove the wireless outfit from the machine.

Stores of petrol and oil were sent to the various landing grounds along the route, as were also a number of spare parts and propellers, but it was found that the latter were not required as the flight was completed with the same tyres and propeller, which, the lecturer said, were still fit for extensive use at the end of the flight.

Towards the end of September, 1924, van der Hoop, his pilot, Lieutenant Poelman, and his mechanic, van der Broeke, had completed all arrangements for the start of the great flight, and the Fokker VII left the Schiphol Aerodrome at Amsterdam. Flying over Soesterberg, the Dutch military Aerodrome, they proceeded *via* Deventer to the German frontier, and the lecturer said that the trip over the monotonous plains of Germany was rather uninteresting. He and Poelman relieved one another at regular intervals, and time passed quickly. At Dresden they reached the River Elbe, which was followed between the Ore Mountains into Czecho-Slovakia. In the afternoon they reached Prague, where the Chech authorities gave them an enthusiastic welcome. It had been their intention to start early the next morning, but the authorities wanted them to await the weather reports, and as these took rather a long time, there was some delay in starting. Over the hills of Bohemia, where the clouds were unusually low, they made for the Danube, which they followed for a considerable distance as it flowed through the vast plains, with many suitable places for forced landings. Belgrade was reached at sunset, and a landing was made by the aid of landing lights at the aerodrome. So far the flight had been carried out to schedule, but the third day's flying turned out to be less favourable. The original plan had been to follow the Danube from Belgrade through the Iron Gates over Roumania across Bulgaria and the Balkan Mountains to Constantinople. They were, however, advised not to go through the Iron Gates, owing to bad weather, and, therefore, chose the southern route *via* Bulgaria. A small river was followed up to Nish, and from there eastwards over the mountains, but as they flew high a strong headwind developed which compelled them to come down and try to find protection behind the mountains. The railway which formed their landmark, climbed higher and higher, and the gorge through which it passed became more narrow. Suddenly, the gorge made a sharp turn, and as the aviators did not know whether the gorge continued behind the bend, or whether it stopped suddenly and the train passed through a tunnel, they decided to turn back. Making a sharp left-hand turn, they "missed" the mountain, as the lecturer put it, "by the skin of their teeth," and flew back again to gain altitude. After that had been reached they crossed the mountains safely and flew down towards Sofia. Sofia was passed and they were flying over the plains of Maritza, when suddenly serious engine trouble developed. Until now the engine had been running splendidly, but a few miles off the small town of Philippopolis, the radiator thermometer began to rise, while the engine revs. dropped. Finally, the engine stopped altogether, and there was just time to do a sharp "S" turn, so as to come in reach of a small meadow. The landing did not appear difficult, but suddenly a wheel touched some obstacle and the machine rolled on, bouncing and inclining more and more to the right, until the right wing