

AUTOMATIC CONTROL



The Skymaster at Brize Norton.

"Flight" Photograph

Operational Sequence of the Transatlantic Flight : Importance of Landing

WE have no desire to be captious and it is with complete sincerity that we accord the Americans their every due in making the recent automatically controlled flight across the Atlantic. It was a fine achievement. But too much sensational interpretation has been placed on the event. Admittedly it is easy to regard the flight as the herald of a new era in flying, and also easy to see in it a step forward in mankind's progress toward doing his neighbour injury without incurring risk to himself in the process. Yet neither of these surface impressions is truly accurate: the first is too long-sighted and the second too short-sighted.

This whole achievement must be seen in undistorted perspective. Fully automatic control of aircraft as a normal operating procedure is by no means with us as yet nor is it likely to come for quite some considerable time. As for the military side, automatic control is far more likely to be eclipsed by the remote control of expendable missiles.

Essentially, the greatest single factor in importance

in the Americans' recent flight lies in the automatic landing made at Brize Norton. Interesting and impressive as are the other aspects of the flight, these pale in significance beside the landing feature. We in this country are not behind the Americans in automatic control—at least not in essentials—and in point of fact a Lancaster at the Blind Landing Experimental Unit, Martlesham, has already executed some 200 automatic approaches, many of which have embraced automatic landing. In this connection the availability of the new British Smith electric autopilot (*Flight*, September 25th) is expected to expedite matters considerably for it is officially regarded as the most advanced automatic pilot in the world. The business of feeding the requisite information into an automatic pilot is not essentially difficult; in fact, had a sufficiently good autopilot then existed much of what was done in this spectacular transatlantic crossing could have been accomplished before the war. Not so expeditiously, of course, since to-day much is done by electronic means which, two years ago, had not been developed.

Although not intended to be a faithful representation of the actual track, this map does give the essential geography of the flight.

