Our American Correspondent Reports . . .

AS this newsletter has previously remarked, the matter of flying safety is much in people's minds in the United States today. As one of the carriers here says about its excellent accident-free record, "Safety is no Accident," and it has always been recognized that you get safety only by working hard for it, both on the ground and in the air. Lately, however, there has been a better appreciation of the fact that the problem must be considered from the moment that the first draughtsman puts pen to paper, and unless safety is designed into the product from the beginning—whether complete aeroplane, or engine, or accessory—it is hardly likely to come along of itself at a later date.

It is this primary-thinking approach that an organization known as the Flight Safety Foundation has been preaching. And the doctrine was probably necessary. For there was, and still is in many fields, an American tendency to ignore the fundamental approach, and to rush past the period of contemplation in an eagerness to get on with the job. The result is that troubles that should never have been allowed to occur in the first place often have to be cured at a later stage. It has sometimes been so with air safety. One has frequently heard discussions as to how to cope with some emergency—let us say fire—once it has occurred, whereas a little attention might well have been paid in the original design to preventing a fire in the first place.

The Flight Safety Foundation—which is now a branch of the Guggenheim Foundation—is supported by voluntary contributions and is a non-profit-making organization. It must have had a hard struggle in its early days, but now—to judge by its bulletins and monthly reports—the corner has been turned, and its work is beginning to have a real effect on the thinking of both designers and operators. It would probably have been impossible to develop an equivalent organization in England; but here, where a committee can be set up and given a name and an alphabetical title and get supporters at the drop of a hat, and where it is easier to raise the funds necessary for such a project, the imagination of a few interested people has proved most productive. Yet it was principally the foresight and energy of one person—Mr. Jerry Lederer—that was and still is responsible for the organization's final success. We believe that the summer meeting of this Foundation is to take place in Europe this year, when British operators and others who would not normally be able to attend will be able to get a chance to see and hear the kind of work which it does.

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SO far as airline accidents versus other modes of transport are concerned, the following recently-published statistics are interesting (if only to show how dangerous it is to drive a car!):—

	Total Number of Deaths	Rate per 100 Million Passenger Miles	
	1952	1952*	1951
(1) Scheduled U.S. domestic air transport	46	0.38	1.3
(2) Scheduled U.S. International air transport	94	3.1	1.1
(3) Irregular U.S. non-scheduled air transport	26	2.1	7.4
(4) U.S. railroads	150	—	0.43
(5) U.S. Inter-city buses ...	130	—	0.22
(6) U.S. passenger cars and taxis	21,000	—	2.4

* Estimated.

A strange thing about the accident figures for the American airline operators, international and domestic combined, is that, although the number of aircraft miles flown has increased tremendously, the accident and fatality rate has (with the exception of one bad year) remained more or less the same. This is clearly shown in the following table:—

Year	Aircraft Miles Flown (×1,000)	Number of Accidents Total	Fatal
1938	... 75,282 ...	29 ...	7
1940	... 119,467 ...	35 ...	3
1942	... 127,225 ...	25 ...	5
1944	... 149,114 ...	31 ...	4
1946	... 356,405 ...	43 ...	11
1948	... 414,755 ...	64 ...	6
1950	... 439,920 ...	40 ...	6
1952 (est.)	... 543,000 ...	35 ...	6

The year 1946 was the black one for fatal crashes and its evil record was due largely to the introduction of larger and faster equipment for which neither the operators nor the navigational or ground approach facilities were really prepared. Quite why 1948 should have had so many accidents—most of them, luckily, non-fatal—is unknown, but it may also have been due to the introduction of new types. It is a subject for congratulation, however, that from February 28th, 1952, to February 28th, 1953, the American domestic carriers did not have one single fatality—a remarkable achievement.

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ANOTHER occurrence here that, if it develops, won't half put the cat among the pigeons is a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution, put forward by a Senator Bricker of Ohio—never distinguished for his international outlook—and for which he has some considerable backing in the Senate. This would require, *inter alia*, that all those international agreements normally negotiated by the State Department and signed by the President would in future have to be submitted for Congressional approval. Furthermore, agreements already in force would be declared invalid and would have to be submitted also. (This would affect international agreements apart from civil aviation, and one of the papers went so far as to say that it would "cripple the President and the State Department in the conduct of international negotiations." This is not the first time this idea has come up (there was a flurry of similar suggestions after the last Canadian-U.S. bilateral aviation agreement) and although it never got far under the Democrats, who realized its dangers full well, it may do better now. But all those countries which have bilaterals with the United States are watching developments like a lot of hawks. For if the U.S. invalidates any bilateral, the other party would presumably have the right to do so too, thus cancelling the agreement, and there are not many countries which would not be glad of a chance to cancel and re-negotiate, and try and alter clauses which they now feel may be working to their disadvantage. Of this fact the State Department and the American international carriers are only too well aware, so there must be some concern in Washington as to the outcome of this particular piece of proposed legislation.

There is another point which might be detrimental to the foreign countries concerned, and that is that final approval could be more dependent on the mood of Congress, or the pressure from interested parties, than on the international wisdom of the arrangement. Delays, too, could occur—but whether these would be any greater than those which might, and sometimes do, occur under the present C.A.B. regulations (which one presumes would be cancelled) remains to be seen.

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THE British film *The Sound Barrier* (released in the United States as *Breaking Through the Sound Barrier*) has had quite a success in New York. After a run at a Broadway theatre it has now gone out into the country, where it is said to be doing as well, if not better, than it did in the Big City. But not all the technical comment has been 100 per cent favourable, and the following editorial from a recent issue of *American Aviation*, by Mr. Wayne Parrish (again), puts forward a point of view which has been mentioned on more than one occasion by aviation people who have seen the film:—

HOW WAS THAT AGAIN?

Whenever the British find themselves lacking in a first of some kind they make up the deficiency by producing a movie. And when it comes to producing good movies the British can rightfully claim supremacy over Hollywood hands down. But sometimes in their eagerness to keep up the morale of that tight little island they have a way of dispensing with facts. Very gracefully, mind you, but with a completeness that is sometimes astonishing as well as awe-inspiring nonetheless.

We finally got around to seeing *Breaking the Sound Barrier* which, as movies go, is very excellent. But in their enthusiasm the producers got so mixed up with the facts that every viewer of the movie could but conclude that it was the British, not the Americans, who first achieved supersonic flight. At one point in the film there was a tense moment when somebody mentioned that the Americans were also at work on the sound barrier, but that was the last of it. Otherwise the British came out absolutely supreme, complete with tears, personal tragedies, frumpled chief engineer, and all that. Now mind you, the film didn't come **out** and *say* that the British were first—it just left a very neat impression with the viewers. Nice work if you can get it.

Frankly, one feels that Mr. Parrish is right in what he says, and that he is justified in taking the producers to task for not making it clear that the Americans were the first deliberately to exceed Mach 1, and with an aircraft designed for that purpose. It would not have been difficult to make some mention in the dialogue of the film and give credit where it was due. It would have been generous, honest and historically accurate. After all, we get hot enough under the collar when anyone suggests that Lindbergh made the first non-stop Atlantic flight.