AVIATION IN CHINA

BY

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When one speaks of aviation in China one immediately visualizes the possibilities of the four hundred million more or less, of China's population taking the air. The vast distances to be covered and the relatively slow existing means of travel are conducive to the establishment of successful aerial transportation.

However, what little experience aeronautical firms have had in marketing their machines in China has not unfortunately, always been very promising. The signing of the new treaty recently, however, should considerably change the conditions of carrying out trade and business.

Bacon has said that there be three things that make a country great and prosperous—fertile soil, busy workshops, and an easy conveyance of men and commodities from one place to another.

Great delays now occur to those who have desire to do business with different parts of China. People up-country are often cut off from the more civilized centers by many days, many weeks and even months of travel.

All this hinders good administration, quick intercourse, and undoubtedly is bad for business and general commercial advancement.

The development of air travel is proceeding by leaps and bounds in many parts of the world. In other parts, particularly China, it is almost stationary.

Surely, then, China should create a real air policy and use all resources for linking up the scattered portions of her vast country, the principle of which is not solely to plan for Chinese gain, but to bring about such better international understanding as to create such a situation that controversies between China and other nations need not arise.

The latest report on aviation in this country shows that the National Government is taking an intensive interest in civil aviation and its possibilities. A grant of ten million dollars has been made to the
Aeronautical Bureau, with the object of encouraging in every possible way those who are devoting their energies to air enterprise.

A very modest beginning, admittedly, but one that spells hope for the future.

It was in 1920 that China first took an active interest in aviation and it may be interesting to recall the events during and since that time.

In 1919, what is now termed the "Vickers Loan" was made between Messrs. Vickers & Co., Ltd., and the Peking Government, and a certain number of converted war type machines, which included the Vickers' Vimy and Avro training machines, were delivered to Peking early in 1920. Aerodromes were opened, workshops erected and a definite system of training Chinese pilots and mechanics under foreign supervision was established.

In the meantime the postal authorities started a scheme for linking up China with air mail lines, and that able British pilot, Col. H. St. Clair Smallwood, carried out the necessary survey work. The present Hungjiao Aerodrome at Shanghai was one of the chain of air mail aerodromes. Two Handley Pages and two S.E.S. machines were imported. Unfortunately this commercial scheme did not mature.

The political squabbles and military activities intervened, finally culminating in the seizure of all the available aeroplanes and materials by Military Tuchuns, and Col. Smallwood and his staff returned to England.

Whilst the Military Tuchuns had the machines, they had neither the ground organization and knowledge, nor sufficient pilots to fly the machines available, with the inevitable consequence that the machines were left to rot.

That they had gained some appreciation of the value of aircraft was evidenced by the fact that the Mukden Government then commenced another aviation scheme and a contract was concluded with some French firms for the Brequet No. 14 type early in 1923.

During this period a small international group of enthusiastic foreigners launched a scheme in Shanghai, with the object of importing engines and demonstrating to the Chinese officials the feasibility of building the fuselage with Chinese labour and from Chinese materials.

General Ho Feng-lin gave his support to the scheme and the first machine ever made in China was the result. Made at the Lungwha Aerodrome, Shanghai, from Chinese materials exclusively, it was flown in July, 1923. This machine, as will be seen from the accompanying illustration, followed orthodox lines and came up to expectation in every way. The pilot, Major W. E. B. Holland reported that she behaved very satisfactorily in flight. An interesting feature in connection with this event, is that the propeller was given, as a souvenir to the Royal Air Force Association of Shanghai in appreciation by the designers for services rendered.

It was unfortunate that military disturbances should again intervene and so destroy the peaceful expansion of aerial schemes in China.

With such difficulties it was only natural that the handful of Chinese and foreigners interested in aviation should become discouraged.
There remained a period of quiescence practically from 1923 to the present day.

The great advance made in civil aviation throughout the world and the historic long-distance-flights accomplished during the last four or five years have had their effect on China. Once again interest has been aroused, and whilst the military commanders are keenly alive to the new arm of the services, the Government are taking a practical interest in the possibilities of development of aerial transport.

The latest tentative proposals afloat are for the formation of flying clubs throughout the country, and the opening in the very near future of an aerial line between Shanghai and Hankow.

The Chinese Government have actually placed orders for a quantity of Moth machines, and Avro-Avian, both of which are suitable for school and club purposes. Some Ryan and Curtis machines have also been ordered and the Fokka; whilst inquiries are abroad for the largest type of aircraft passenger types.

With the unification and centralization of China under the Kuo-

mintang and the National Government arguing well for her soon to take a leading part in world affairs, the importance of aerial development in China cannot be overestimated, and it is gratifying, not only to the writer who has long been closely connected with aviation in China, but to all well-wishers of aerial development, that the Government are at last giving very serious and practical support to the important business of establishing a network of airways, similar to that now established in Europe.

If this is done, and done successfully, it will do more to strengthen the seeds of patriotism than anything else, and it will most certainly be a memorable day for China when the Chinese themselves are able to accomplish the long-distance-flights as others have done.