

External Affairs

Supplementary Paper

No. 53/28 CANADA, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AVIATION

An address by the Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, delivered at a dinner given by the Government to the delegates of the International Air Transport Association, at Montreal, October 5, 1953.

Forty-four years ago the first flight ever to be made in what is now the British Commonwealth was made at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, just six years after the opening of the air age by the Wright Brothers. The flight in "The Silver Dart", as the craft was named, was made by John A.D. McCurdy, who has continued to contribute to the development of aviation in this country ever since. I should add that until recently he was serving his country in another capacity as lieutenant-governor of the province in which he made his historic flight.

In one of his early flights, Mr. McCurdy attempted to span the 105 miles of water between Key West and Cuba but was forced down into the sea a short distance from Havana. The failure to reach his goal on that occasion did not dampen his belief in the potential of aviation, for he cabled the Toronto Star about the incident in the following words: "Although not disposed to make any wild calculations...I am seriously impressed with the possibility of making inter-continental, trans-ocean flights by aeroplane".

It was a similar faith in other men combined with perseverance and daring that has made that cautious prediction sound amusing today. Many of you represent airlines whose ships now fly across great ocean distances as a matter of routine. So thoroughly have the techniques of ocean flight been mastered that it is difficult to realize that as recently as the Second World War, a trans-Atlantic flight was still a great adventure.

But Canada's contribution to aviation was not limited to the deeds of her early pilots alone. Canadians have done their share in the technical side of aviation as well. It was a Canadian, Walter Turnbull, who is credited with the development of the controllable-pitch propeller as early as 1916, an invention which much later became the standard equipment of all aircraft and which greatly increased their versatility and efficiency.

While I have only quoted two examples, I think it is fair to say that Canadians have done their share in the development of aviation. And I think it is also accurate to say that no country has so greatly benefitted from aviation and the development of air transport as has Canada. Millions of acres of our land consists of forests, mountains and lakes and Arctic tundra which provided almost insurmountable obstacles to communication until the advent of the airplane.