



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
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THE MCKEE TROPHY

(The Development of Aviation in Canada)

Text of a statement made by the Minister of National Defence, Mr. Brooke Claxton, at the presentation ceremony at the Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, October 27, 1953.

This is the twenty-fifth time that the McKee Trophy has been presented to the Canadian, service or civilian, who, in the opinion of those responsible for the award, has rendered the most outstanding service to aviation during that year.

The trophy was presented by the late Dalgell McKee of Pittsburg, an aviation enthusiast who made the first Trans-Canada flight by seaplane in 1926.

This year the award has been given to a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

In the name of those responsible for the award as well as of all others present or represented here, I have now great pleasure in congratulating for his outstanding work the officer to whom this presentation is now being made, Squadron Leader Keith R. Greenaway.

...This occasion reminds us of the tremendous progress made in aviation since 1926, when the award was first given.

In 1927 the RCAF had a total strength of 470 and it operated a total of about 75 aircraft. This is what they were: Vedette-Viking-Varuna, Avro 504, DH4, Curtis HS2L, Fokker, DH Moth, Douglas Seaplane, Fairchild FC2, "Puffer" (last named used for crop dusting purposes).

Look at the year 1931. That year commercial aircraft carried 100,128 passengers a distance of 5,280,958 passenger miles.

This year, 1952-53, Canadian commercial airlines carried 2,070,870 passengers a total of 57,961,010 miles without a single fatal casualty.

In 1931 the RCAF flew a total of 19,171 hours and covered a distance of 1,725,390 miles.

This year the RCAF has a total strength of 46,307, over 80 times as much. The RCAF has been operating regular scheduled runs of two flights a week from Dorval to Tokyo and return, a distance of over

13,000 miles. Since this run started in July 1950 the RCAF has made 515 round flights of an average distance of 13,860 miles each, for a total of 6,019,000 miles, without loss or damage to plane or personnel, a fine record for these North Star aircraft and for the RCAF.

During this year the RCAF has also been running regular scheduled flights to Churchill and Resolute Bay, as well as between Dorval and Edmonton and Dorval and Goose Bay.

Simultaneously the RCAF has been operating regular scheduled flights to Europe and has also carried out an extraordinary movement, flying to Europe and landing safely nine out of twelve squadrons of "Sabre" fighters, the aircraft of the other three squadrons having been taken over on HMCS "Magnificent".

Today the RCAF has twelve squadrons of "Sabre" fighters and nine in Europe, together with an air division headquarters at Metz and a depot at Langar in England. In the air division and the other groups there are serving abroad today in the RCAF a total of nearly 5,000 men and women. Contrast this with the total strength of 571, 25 years ago.

In addition to the planes on loan, under contract and those kept in reserve, during this last year the RCAF had in operation a total of over 1,600 aircraft. These included "Sabre" fighters and CF-100s, as well as C-119s, three aircraft which certainly are not excelled in their field anywhere. As contrasted with 19,000 hours in 1931, they flew a total of 705,707 hours. I am glad to say that their accident rate compares favourably with that of other countries known to us.

Though of American design, the "Sabres" are made in Canada and all those being currently produced are being equipped with Canadian-designed and built "Orenda" engines.

In addition, I know that it is noteworthy and particularly interesting to this gathering that as well as the aircraft mentioned we are also using the RCAF Canadian-built types such as the "Otter", "Beaver", "Chipmunk", "Harvard" and the T-33 trainer.

During this period too we have established an air-training plan under which a large number of aircrew were trained, including aircrew for Britain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Italy and Norway.

You will appreciate that throughout this period the RCAF, like the other armed forces, has had to carry on its operations so as to carry out our commitments in Korea to stop aggression there. In that difficult job in that far-off area the services have not failed in any respect.

At the same time, with other nations, we have done our part to build up the combined strength in the North Atlantic lines to prevent aggression in Europe. Again Canada has carried out every commitment in advance of the target date.

Both its Brigades and Air Division are trained fighting formations, second to none.

At the same time we have been pressing on with measures for the defence of North America in close co-operation with the United States. We have had delays. Who hasn't? Our delays have not been due to any failure to recognize the seriousness of the threat or the importance of the task. They have been due to the fact that there was neither radar nor communications equipment nor aircraft in existence or even designed to do the job. Had we pressed forward with what we had four years ago we would now have an obsolete system and obsolete aircraft. Instead of which we are building up defences of the most modern character and they are being built up as fast as can be done, having regard to all our other operations. They will be progressively added to as new means and measures become available and desirable.

A number of events have occurred during the last few months which have drawn attention to the tremendous advances made in aviation, and all of them within the memories of at least some of us here.

The first flight by a machine that was heavier than air occurred just fifty years ago. Its anniversary was attended by the presence of John A. McCurdy, who was the first aviator to fly in the British Empire and who also was, as far as we know, the first man to fly an aircraft for military purposes. I had the honour of unveiling a cairn to commemorate this at Petawawa last year. I have been informed, but have not been able to verify it, that Mr. McCurdy is the senior pilot living in the world today.

Only in the last two or three years have we seen the production of aircraft designed to cross the barrier and fly and fight at speeds beyond sound. During the past twelve months virtually every record for speed and distance has been broken. Our own "Comet" has flown from Goose Bay to London in five hours and fifteen minutes, from Winnipeg to Ottawa in two hours and ten minutes.

Increases in speed have been accompanied by great increases in weight-carrying capacity and range.

They have also been accompanied by great increases in the international and national control of flying, in the completeness and accuracy of weather information, in devices for safe landing and take-off, in aerial beacons and beams along which aircraft are guided home, and perhaps above all, these improvements have been accompanied in the range and efficiency of radar of numerous types to fulfil the varied requirements.

However, in the last resort flying is done by men. More than two-thirds of the accidents with known causes are due to human failure rather than mechanical failure. It is on the quality of the pilot, the competence of the navigator, the efficiency of the engineer that safety of flight depends, just as it is on the efficiency and completeness of the work of the groundcrew that mechanical safety depends.

We have had good records for safety in Canada, both service and civilian, and whether it be in long-range transport or the operations of bush pilots in civilian flying, or bombers and fighters and mappers and anti-submarine chasers in war, Canadians have made an enviable record for themselves for their skill, their courage, their competence and their results.

This trophy recognizes each year an outstanding contribution by some Canadian. It goes to a person, not a company or a service. Squadron Leader Greenaway has earned this himself. I am sure he would, however, recognize that the credit also goes to his service and the training and the people he has been working with.

There are few fields of human activity in which so much depends on all-round competence of a single man, who bears the title of "captain" or "pilot"; also there are few fields in which one man's work so much depends on the close working teamwork of people in the aircraft, traversing the air back to the control tower, then to groundcrew and factory, the designer, the manufacturer and the trained worker. All of them contribute to make the miracle of flight possible. It continues to be a miracle, soaring and inspiring.

So, while we recognize great achievements through hard work, let us also recognize the romance and the wonder still attached to it all.

This is one of the great achievements of our age - ranging through the heavens, changing the face of the earth, bringing mankind closer together for purposes of peace or purposes of war.

It is towards the prevention of war that we have been building and working. We must continue that effort. I remember reading in a great responsible periodical about 1937 an article by a military expert who said that the scope of flight had definite mechanical limits which had already been reached. Why, when he wrote that we were not at the end but at the beginning of a new era! Who dares today to say that we have reached the limits of anything? There is no limit to the scope of space, there are only frontiers for flight. Flying is a job where the only safe course is to keep on saying that "the sky is the limit"...

S/A