

The Eleventh Annual Dinner of The Helicopter Association of Great Britain

Nearly 450 members and their guests attended the Association's Eleventh Annual Dinner, which was held at the Dorchester Hotel on Thursday, 5th September. Despite the fact that we are often criticized for holding the Dinner during "Farnborough Week," attendances increase each year, and it does enable many of our overseas members visiting the country at that time to participate in at least one of the Association's functions.

It was most unfortunate that our President, Lord Brabazon, was not able to attend, and Dr Hislop, our Vice-President, received the official guests, who were as follows: Mr Aubrey Jones, The Minister of Supply, and Mrs Jones, Lord Aberconway, Vice-Chairman, Westland Aircraft Limited, and Lady Aberconway, Mr Eoin C Mekie, Chairman of British Aviation Services Ltd, and his daughter, Miss Mekie, Maj-Gen R K Exham, Director of Land/Air Warfare, The War Office, and Mrs Exham, Mr R E Hardingham, the Secretary and Chief Executive to the Air Registration Board, and Mrs Hardingham, Mr and Mrs James G Weir, and Mr and Mrs Charles Hughesdon.

Mr Aubrey Jones proposed the Toast of The Helicopter Association. The Toast to The Guests was proposed by our Vice-President, Dr Hislop, to which Mr Mekie responded. The following is a resume of their remarks.

Dr G S HISLOP said he should account for his presence in the Chair. This had been due, as we all knew, to the fact that Lord Brabazon, our President, had been advised by his doctors to rest for a few weeks to recover from his illness. He had therefore been compelled, most regretfully, to be absent.

The information which he had on Lord Brabazon's health was that he was recovering fairly slowly.

Dr Hislop was sure that we would join with him in a telegram which had just been sent to Lord Brabazon, as follows:

"Members and Guests of your Association dining here tonight are sorry not to have you with us and send you all our good wishes for a speedy recovery. Helicopter Association of Great Britain, Dorchester Hotel."

The RT HON AUBREY JONES, M P, Minister of Supply, proposed the toast, "The Helicopter Association," and said firstly how very sorry he was that Lord Brabazon could not be there and would like to add his good wishes for his speedy recovery. He had been told that the Helicopter Association was an association of enthusiasts for the helicopter rotor, but unfortunately Ministers were not allowed to be enthusiasts. Nevertheless, however great an enthusiasm ultimately became, there was always something basically right.

about it, although the kernel of truth became covered and clouded over with all kinds of overtones. The Minister had to deal not merely with one particular enthusiasm but with all kinds of other, rival enthusiasms, with their basic element of truth. Speaking as a neutral spectator, he thought we had done extremely well, if a criterion of the value of our work was the way in which we had convinced the Ministry. We had had no better supporter over the last ten or twelve years than the Ministry of Supply, who had supported a number of projects. Indeed, earlier this year the Ministry were criticised by the Select Committee on Estimates, reporting on the Supply of Military Aircraft, for having supported too many helicopter projects. They were criticised for having supported as many as ten.

Like most criticisms of the Ministry of Supply which he had heard, however, this particular criticism was out of date. One of the troubles with the Ministry of Supply was that they hid themselves fairly effectively behind a screen of secrecy so that people were always five years behind the times in criticising them! In fact, they now supported only four projects—the “Bristol 192,” the Westland “Wessex,” an improved “Skeeter,” and, of course, the “Rotodyne.” He also mentioned the great interest with which everyone at the Ministry of Supply was looking forward to the first flight of the “Rotodyne” later this year.

Mr Jones wished to append to this list of projects being supported by the Ministry—the appendix being expressed with much greater gratification than the former—the private venture projects. These included the Fairey “Ultra Light,” the Westland “Widgeon” and the Westland “Westminster.” The more private projects there were, the more the Ministry of Supply would be pleased.

He thought that even the most rabid of anti-helicopter enthusiasts would now agree that the helicopter had come to stay and that the helicopter had definitely proved its use. The two great qualities of the helicopter were its ability to hover and its ability to reach otherwise inaccessible places. It was the first of these qualities which had made the helicopter so indispensable to the Navy, where the helicopter was now an effective and unique instrument for rescue from the sea.

Apart from this rescue work in the Navy, the ability to hover now promised great usefulness in anti-submarine warfare, both in the detection of submarines and in offence against submarines.

It was the second property which had conferred on the helicopter its great power of general rescue in emergencies. Countless feats had been reported performed by helicopters in the Korean operations, but perhaps fewer knew of the extraordinary work done by helicopters two years ago in snowbound conditions in the North of Scotland. There were two hundred missions, many animals were lifted, stores and quantities of food dropped and many patients were taken to hospital.

Mr Jones wondered if we expected Ministers of Supply to act as prophets and to tell something of helicopters in the future. The essential question was, had helicopters a future in civil transport? Did the future in civil transport belong to the helicopter? Or did it belong to the aeroplane—the aeroplane making use by some means or another of shortened

take-off and landing? Or, on the other hand, did the future belong to a helicopter which would become part aeroplane for propulsion purposes?

He did not know the answer but hoped that we, as helicopter enthusiasts would not interpret his neutrality in speaking for the Ministry as a prejudice against helicopters.

He went on to say that he hoped we would not interpret the absence of a helicopter service in this country as a prejudice on the part of the Government as a whole against helicopters. He knew what we felt on the question of a helicopter service. He had seen the Brussels-Paris helicopter service for the first time last summer and came back filled with a zeal for a helicopter service in England. However, he was confronted at the Ministry of Supply with the facts that the Brussels-Paris helicopter service is heavily subsidised, as are the various helicopter services in the United States.

In other words, the capital costs and the operating costs of helicopters were still on the high side. If these were brought down, then clearly there could be a future for helicopters. If they could not be brought down, that would be the great disadvantage.

Despite his neutrality, Mr Jones did not want us to think that the Ministry had closed the door to a helicopter service or to the future of helicopters. The door was being kept open by the B.E.A.'s helicopter experimental unit, which was being kept alive and was carrying out helicopter development work of various kinds for the Government as well as charter work at home and abroad on a commercial basis.

In conclusion Mr Jones said a word on the attitude of the Ministry of Supply towards the future of helicopters. The Ministry is not prejudiced against helicopters, although in matters other than helicopters, they had been going through a rather difficult time. They had on the one hand to tighten the purse strings and on the other hand to promote speed in research—two not very easy things to join together.

But whatever the difficulties in this general sense, it was to be hoped that it would never be said of the Ministry of Supply that they closed their eyes to a technical development of value. Mr Jones did not think that this had ever been done, nor would it be, but whatever the difficulties, he hoped they would always see our problems with objectivity and understanding.

It was in the hope that we believed this, and in the belief that whatever their difficulties this attitude of objectivity would ensure always good relations between the two parties, that Mr Jones was happy to propose, warmly, the toast of the Helicopter Association.

Dr G. S. Hislop, Vice-President, in reply, said that the Minister was faced with the problem of fostering an industry while the budget is contracting and thought that must be an extremely difficult task.

The Association would have to convince the Ministry that the survivors from the last sweep of the axe would be justified in receiving its continuing support. Mr Jones had also pointed out that for civil transport use the helicopter had yet to achieve the requisite operating costs. This constituted a challenge which Dr Hislop was sure we should do our best to meet.

He would like to recap some domestic matters of the Association. One change concerned our friend Norman Hill. He was a founder member and

a great strength to the Association right from the Association's inception. He served as Vice-Chairman, Chairman of Council and Vice-President, but had now retired from these arduous tasks. The Association was extremely grateful to him for all the work he had done in the past.

Dr Hislop went on to say that membership stood at about 500. It was growing, but not as fast as he thought it should at a time such as this, which reflected the growth of the industry as a whole. It would grow faster if firms would encourage more of the younger members to join the Association, and probably they and the Association would derive a great deal of benefit.

Last year Lord Brabazon made a presentation of The Alan Marsh Medal given to pilots of outstanding achievement. This year the award had posed a number of problems, because there were a considerable number of pilots who in their different ways were equally worthy of the award. This had caused the Council to ask the Trustees to look at the terms of the Trust in order that we might ascertain the exact conditions so that we were quite sure in which direction the award should go. It was expected that next year the award of the Medal would be resumed.

The Alan Marsh Award was given to a student of outstanding ability with the intention of giving him the opportunity to learn something of the rudiments of flying the helicopter. This year the Award had gone to E. R. Kendall, of Saunders Roe and the College of Aeronautics.

Dr Hislop expressed the Association's gratitude to Mr and Mrs Charles Hughesdon for having shown us, once again, such generous hospitality at the most successful helicopter rally and garden party during the summer.

Turning to the subject of British aircraft, Dr Hislop said that the most important event was the publication of the Defence White Paper. Helicopters were not specifically mentioned in the Paper, but there was little doubt that helicopters will be required in greater numbers and larger sizes.

The next most important event was the successful part played by helicopters in the operations at Suez last November when a Commando Brigade was flown off by helicopter from a carrier. Much of the success of that operation was due to the skill and knowledge of the service members of the Helicopter Association.

We had been glad to see at Farnborough a second British helicopter equipped with gas turbine engines. The scale of production of helicopters was growing at Bristol, Saunders-Roe and Westland, but it was important to remember that the numbers involved were still far short of the American output.

Turning to the large and economic transport helicopter, mentioned by the Minister, three firms were trying to meet the requirement—the Bristol 193 development, the Westland "Westminster" and the "Rotodyne".

Dr Hislop also mentioned a recent exploit by a helicopter when a sick person was flown from Ipswich to Guys Hospital. The landing had to be at Guys because there was no London Heliport. The South Bank had ceased to exist and there seemed to be no intention of opening a replacement. This

was a very grave situation as other cities were opening Heliports. New York boasted one or two, Chicago was opening another, Paris had opened one. The example had been set all over the world, but London was closing them. It was to be hoped that the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation would look at this question again.

The official reason for the present policy was that until the twin engine transport helicopter was available there was no point in having a Heliport. The Association disagreed and would like to see steps taken to provide a small, inexpensive heliport, which might take the form of a platform moored on the Thames between Westminster and Battersea. At the Air Show in Paris helicopters were scuttling backwards and forwards between Paris and Le Bourget, but the S B A C in connection with the Farnborough Display this year were not very keen. It was to be hoped that the S B A C would bear this in mind next year.

A significant feature in Paris was the flying of the Atar Volant. This had a very great performance and had been seen by many to be a direct challenge to the helicopter. In the Association's programme for next session it was hoped that a lecture dealing with this and with other forms of direct lift vehicles would be included, so that the strength of both could be appreciated.

For inter-city transport not only had the major airlines to be considered but also the powerful and growing body of independent operators. Dr Hislop hoped that the guest speaker, Mr Eoin Mekie, would say a little of his intentions as a power in the land of the independent operators.

Dr Hislop then said how happy the Association was to have as their guests the ladies, as well as many eminent members of the Services and the Government service and members from industry. He also mentioned the presence of Mr Igor Sikorsky whom the Association were delighted to have with them.

As guest speaker, Mr Eoin Mekie would respond to the toast, "The Guests." He was Chairman of British Aviation Services Ltd, which included two of the most interesting and unusual services—Aquila and Silver City.

In proposing the toast, "The Guests," Dr Hislop coupled with it the name of Mr Eoin Mekie.

Mr Eoin C Mekie, in an amusing reply, thanked the Association warmly for its hospitality. He said that the position of the "poor" operator was not an enviable one but it gave him great pleasure to see the way in which the Association progressed from strength to strength. On behalf of the guests he wished the Association well-being for the future.

ERRATUM

An error occurs on Page 256 of the August Journal, Volume 11, No 4, "Helicopter Operations at Port Said." The fifth paragraph should read

"The decision to use the helicopters to land No 45 *Royal Marine Commando* at Port Said was only made just before the operation."