

The Thirteenth Annual Dinner of The Helicopter Association of Great Britain

Over 400 members and their guests attended the Association's Thirteenth Annual Dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, London, on Thursday, September 10th

The Association's guests, who were welcomed by our President, Mr N E Rowe, included Sir George Gardner, Director Royal Aircraft Establishment, and Lady Gardner, Captain E C Beard, R N , D R N A , and Mrs Beard, Mr Peter G Masefield, President of the Royal Aeronautical Society, Mr and Mrs Eric Mensforth, Mr and Mrs J G Weir, and Mr R Graham. We also had great pleasure in welcoming Mr Dave Postle, of Kaman Aircraft Corporation. Mr Postle, who has served as a member of the Rotorcraft Committee of the Air Transport Association and of the Helicopter Committee of the International Air Transport Association, is a long-standing member of the American Helicopter Society, and brought with him the following message from the President of that Society, which was read out by the President during his speech

" Mr Chairman, members, and honored guests, on behalf of the members of the American Helicopter Society and as its fifteenth President, I send you our heartiest greetings and every sincere wish for the further growth and advancement of the rotating wing art and industry in your country, and with it a wish for the further blossoming of your Helicopter Association activities including a substantial membership growth

I realize that these sentiments may seem late in view of the pending merger of the Association with the Royal Aeronautical Society, but on the contrary this statement only further emphasizes the point that it is perfectly possible within the foreseeable future that your merger may provide an influential change in the Royal Aeronautical Society

With the fixed-wing aircraft being slowly but inexorably relegated to the background by the advent of the rocket age, and the helicopter still potentially ripe for further development in its slowly expanding military role, and in its presently expanding but hugely potential commercial short-haul role, I would prophesy that it is entirely possible that the Royal Aeronautical Society could some day become the Royal Helicopter Society with the fixed wing contingent being in the minority

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, with this seed planted to hunt at the great opportunity confronting you, that of providing the great and venerable Royal Aeronautical Society with a new and boundless interest to replace the predicted dim future of the frozen wing field, I again wish you every possible success for emergence from the pioneering stage to an era of great practical advance and world-wide common acceptance of this vehicle which can unfetter the individual from his earthbound heritage and almost literally allow him to keep " one foot on the ground "

RALPH P ALEX, *President,*
American Helicopter Society

The President, Mr N E Rowe, welcomed Mr Postle on behalf of the Association and asked him to convey our compliments and thanks to the American Helicopter Society

The President then announced the election of Messrs Eric Mensforth, Raoul Hafner and Jack Richardson as Honorary Members of the Association—the highest honour the Association can award—for distinguished work in the advancement of the helicopter. He offered them the Association's congratulations and thanks for the immense contribution they have made over many years. The President mentioned that only five others had been so honoured—J de La Cierva, J G Weir, R N Liptrot, Igor Sikorsky, and J A J Bennett, our present Chairman

The toast to " The Helicopter Association " was proposed by Mr Peter G Masefield, Managing Director of Bristol Aircraft Ltd and President of the Royal Aeronautical Society. He said that looking at a distinguished helicopter gathering

of this sort, he was reminded of Oscar Wilde when he said that the world is divided into two classes, those who believe the incredible and those who do the improbable. Both these classes are always very well represented in any helicopter gathering.

It gave him special pleasure to propose the health of the Helicopter Association, since as President of the Royal Aeronautical Society he had had the privilege of carrying forward in the past few months the discussions on the coming marriage of the Royal Aeronautical Society and the Helicopter Association. He assured his hearers that the marriage would not be just one of convenience—it was an alliance which, he hoped and believed, would do much to strengthen a really vital aspect of British aeronautics. It was hoped that the formalities would be completed by the end of this year, and that the approval of the Privy Council to the new title—The Royal Aeronautical Society, with which is incorporated the Helicopter Association of Great Britain—would be obtained so that the new organisation could begin to function from the start of 1960. The new Rotorcraft Section of the Royal Aeronautical Society, which it had been agreed would be the new name of the Association, would go from strength to strength, and he hoped that the union would be blessed with lots of little helicopters, and, later on, with lots of big helicopters as well.¹ He was sure that it would have no problems in rearing not only its own rotating wing children, but even, perhaps, that interesting new step-child, the hovercraft, as well. In any event, the Royal Aeronautical Society would be proud to have the Association with it, and would do everything possible to make its future happy and secure. He wished to pay tribute to Mr Eric Mensforth and Jack Richardson for their wise and helpful guidance during these negotiations.

This year had been a great year for helicopters. There had been notable events. One of them was the opening of the Westland Heliport at Battersea. We all wished to congratulate our friends at Westlands for their initiative and enterprise in showing the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation the way it should go. One was also delighted to see that with the Christmas pantomime season coming along, Lord Douglas, Mr Aubrey Jones, and Sir Francis Festing, C I G S, had all clubbed together and taken a box for the first night of Peter Pan. When that immortal cry goes up, as it will—“Do you believe in Fairies? If so, clap your hands”—they will give thunderous applause.

Despite the promise of V T O L, S T O L, and all the rest, he believed that this year the helicopter was more firmly established than ever before. We had seen a great step forward in the helicopter in the past year, and could now look forward to the long-term future of the rotating wing aircraft. He was quite sure that, whatever the configuration, we could say with really firm conviction that the helicopter was here to stay. The Army, Navy and Air Force were all helicopter-minded these days.

Mr Masefield then proposed the Toast of the Association, coupled with the name of Mr N E Rowe, its President.

In his reply, Mr Rowe said that we had listened with delight to a typically Masefield talk, in which he was witty and wise all at once. He thought we all felt that in moving into the ambit of the Royal Aeronautical Society, we were doing what was best for the whole of aeronautical development in this country. There was no question, as Mr Masefield had said, and as the President of the American Helicopter Society had so forcefully said, that the helicopter had arrived, and that it was going places and would have a very big future. There would be new developments of all kinds, and he felt that to have this advance going on in this country was in the best interests of us all. He therefore conveyed to Mr Masefield, on behalf of those present, our best thanks for his words and for the manner in which he had proposed the Toast.

Before proposing the Toast of “The Guests” Mr Rowe felt that on this occasion of transition from one stage to another, it was appropriate to say something about those who had created the Association. He wished to mention the names of those who had carried the burden of the day, because he considered this an appropriate time to hear about them. Jack Richardson had reminded him of what some of us may have forgotten—that in the early days of the war, in May 1940, a special squadron—529 Squadron—was formed equipped with Cierva C30 autogyros. He thought this was done as the result of a suggestion by W/Cdr Reggie Brie, who was present that evening, to the Air Ministry. That squadron kept together during the war and did extraordinarily valuable work.

The squadron was commanded at the outset by Alan Marsh, so tragically killed in an accident in 1950. He was the first Chairman of the Association. In fact, it was the initiative of the pilots in this case who got the thing going. They were a

great body of enthusiasts, carried away by what they saw in this field. This vehicle could do things which no other vehicle they knew of could do, and they thought this should be recognised by a body devoted to the continuance and pursuance of the helicopter field. They formed the Association as a company limited by the guarantee of its members, and the names of those who signed the Articles and Memorandum of Association—they were all pilots—were —Harry Alan Marsh, Reginald Alfred Charles Brie, Norman James Gunton Hill, James Edgar Harper, Guy Cecil Turner, Maurice Stephen Paul Houndret, Frederick John Cable and Basil Henry Arkell. Unfortunately Cable lost his life in the same accident as Alan Marsh, but a number of them were still with us. They had done great work for the Association, and we were delighted to have them with us this evening.

In these affairs, of course, the real burden is often carried by the Secretary, and the Association had been most fortunate in those who have served it in that way. Basil Arkell was the first Secretary, followed by Max Stoker, and then by Jack Richardson, who served the Association from 1948 to 1957, for nine most difficult years after the war. He was followed by Mr Roberts and we now have Bob Whitby, our Present Secretary.

The Presidents were Mr J G Weir, Mr Mensforth, Lord Douglas of Kirtleside, and Lord Brabazon of Tara, and the Vice-Presidents, Mr Weir, Mr Hill, Mr Brie, Dr Hislop, and now Jack Richardson. These men had done for us the very onerous task of carrying this thing forward, of keeping up enthusiasm and of giving us publications, lectures and other things. They had kept it going as a real, living concern. Mr Rowe hoped that we should see an even greater enthusiasm in future within the larger body.

Mr Rowe said it was now his very pleasant duty to propose the toast of "The Guests". First, on behalf of the Association, he would like to welcome them. He would like to mention our two Vice-Presidents of the Association, Mr J G Weir, and Mr Eric Mensforth. They had done great things for the advancement of helicopters. He also wished to welcome formally Mr Peter Masefield, Mr Postle as the representative of the President of the American Helicopter Society, and Sir George and Lady Gardner. We were delighted to have them with us, and he would like to offer Sir George, on behalf of all present, our congratulations on his recent appointment as first Civil Controller of Aircraft at the Ministry of Supply. We also had with us Mr and Mrs Bob Weir and Captain and Mrs Beard. Captain Beard had been playing a very important part in the helicopter business recently in the Ministry of Supply. He also welcomed Dr and Mrs Ballantyne, and Mr Bob Graham—a man who was piloting helicopters in 1924/25. Finally, he welcomed the ladies.

Sir George Gardner, in reply, thanked Mr Rowe for his congratulations, but felt that he was more in need of Mr Rowe's good wishes than his congratulations. He was not quite sure where he fitted into this wedding ceremony, but he felt honoured to be invited to respond for the guests. Before saying "thank you" on their behalf, he would like to speak for another minute or two.

Sir George said that it was extremely interesting to note that although the practical achievement of the helicopter has only been realised in recent years, that great man Leonardo da Vinci was experimenting with helicopters in 1500 A D. There was a sketch in his notebook of a proposed aerial screw machine, 96 ft in diameter, to be built, as his notebook says, of iron and bamboo framework, covered with linen cloth heavily starched.

Indeed, in 1868, the Aeronautical Society had a notable exhibition, at which two model helicopters were exhibited. The originator of one of these, Phillips, actually succeeded in 1842 in raising into the air an apparatus weighing 2 lbs by means of revolving fans. The motive power was rather interesting. It was obtained by the combustion of charcoal, nitre and gypsum, thereby providing steam. The engine consisted of rotating arms discharging steam into the atmosphere. Of course, this mode of propulsion was discovered by Hero of Alexandria many years earlier. Sir George felt it was worth quoting from Phillips' own description of this flight. It states:

"All being arranged, the steam was up in a few seconds when the whole apparatus spun round like a top and mounted into the air faster than any bird. To what height it ascended I have no means of ascertaining. The distance travelled was across two fields where, after a long search, I found the machine minus the wings, which had been torn off from contact with the ground."

It was very interesting to reflect that such well-conceived scientific experiments were insufficient to lead directly to the successful development of a practical helicopter. Of course, the reason was that the necessary technology was just not available. The scientific approach is, of course, vitally important, but hand in hand with it must go the advance of technology.

When he first went to the Royal Aircraft Establishment in the middle 'twenties, he was astounded, intrigued, and slightly put off to see and hear about the helicopter which had been built in the R A E to the designs of Brennan. This helicopter, according to R A E records, made 200 flights under the pilotage of Bob Graham, who was the chief aerodynamicist, stressman, engineer and strong right arm of Mr Brennan. None of these flights soared higher than 10 ft and the average duration was three minutes, but in 1925 and 1926 200 helicopter flights was a great achievement.

It was also interesting that this helicopter was designed to lift five men and to carry enough fuel for an hour's flight. It had a rotor 62 ft in diameter and this rotor was driven by propellers mounted at the tips of the rotor. He thought that this was an anticipation of one of the features of the Rotodyne and other helicopters. This series of experiments was suddenly stopped by a crash. Fortunately Bob Graham was not injured. He was sure we were all delighted to see him here tonight.

Progress since then has, of course, been remarkable. We have seen tremendous ingenuity. Constant faith has been applied by those working in the field and there was no doubt that the helicopter has come to stay. Sir George felt sure that there was room for spectacular improvement, but this would only be achieved by great effort, and he hoped that some of this effort would be dedicated to the application of elegance and simplicity in design.

Sir George concluded by relating the tale of the potential customer who was invited to try out a modern electronic translating machine. He fed in the saying "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" and the translation came back in 1½ milliseconds, "The whisky's O K but the meat's gone bad". The meat was not bad tonight—it was jolly good—and on behalf of all the guests he wished to thank the Association for their wonderful hospitality and for the entertainment provided, coupled with the very good wishes of the guests for the Association's great success in the future.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors

Sirs,

I have just received my copy of the June Journal of the Helicopter Association which contains the report of Lt-Col P W Mead's lecture—"The Place of the Helicopter in a Modern Army".

I was surprised to read, on page 150, certain statements regarding No 22 Special Air Service Regiment which are contrary to my own recollection of events as a helicopter pilot in Malaya from 1950-53.

No 22 S A S Regiment was formed in, about, June, 1950, and was commanded by Lt-Col J M Calvert, D S O, R E, for some eighteen months and then by Lt-Col J B M Sloane, O B E. Under the "Briggs Plan" for operations in Malaya the primary role of this unit was deep-jungle penetration whilst other units were, in general, confined to operations on the jungle fringe.

In the early days it was difficult to assess the capabilities of the "Dragonfly" but it was clear that its effectiveness would depend largely upon the ability of the ground forces to provide adequate clearings. However, thanks to the able and inspired leadership of Lt-Col Calvert and the ready co-operation of No 656 Air O P Squadron (Major D P D Oldman, D F C, R A) who provided invaluable guidance from the air to patrols, it was soon proven that helicopters could be used successfully in Malaya. In fact, it could fairly be said of these officers that "they lit the lamp".

Naturally it was inherent that the type of operation in which No 22 S A S Regiment specialised—long range penetration—resulted in the need for more helicopter support than would be normal with other units but it should be remembered that all such requests were filtered through the Joint Operations Room before they were authorised. Later on it became necessary to deploy helicopters to specific