Hattie Meyers Junkin Papers - Writings: "What is This Thing Called Soaring", US Air Service , 1931-11

31 November, 1931

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a new idea, for one of the very earliest aircraft engines, built in 1894 by Sir Hiram Maxim, was a steam plant of very reasonable weight and efficiency. In his experimental work Maxim thoroughly explored the whole problem of propulsion by steam power and it is both significant and prophetic that his later experiments were all concerned with internal combustion engine and its application.

In addition to its influence upon the aircraft engines used for commerce the research and development due to the Schneider Cup competition has been of equal or greater importance in the design and production of military aircraft. It has frequently been said that "The racer of today is tomorrow's service airplane," and the lessons learned in high speed competition are directly applicable to service aircraft intended for national defense.
By virtue of Great Britain's advanced engine and aerodynamic designs she now claims to have the fastest fighting aircraft in existence. Published figures regarding the performance of certain service types indicate that the claim may be justified. In any event one readily sees the influence of racing practice in the design of the recent service airplanes. These airplanes have the same long slender fuselage and finely shaped nose which is so characteristic of recent Schneider Cup aircraft. Frontal area is reduced to

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a minimum and extensive supercharging insures full performance at high altitudes. These facts have a direct influence upon the aircraft industry and it is by virtue of their outstanding performance that a number of the new types of British built military aircraft have been sold to foreign countries.

There is nothing particularly surprising about these developments abroad for the incentive has been supplied by international technical competition. Our own withdrawal after 1926 more or less puts the brakes on high powered engine developments here at home. Experimental projects have been carried on, but lacking the spur of necessity the results have been slow in coming forward. However, engine builders in America acknowledge no superior and it is a significant fact that many features of American service engines are now copied abroad.
What is now needed is a more extensive experimental program with the object of developing engines for the flying cruisers of the future. American engine builders have demonstrated their fitness in meeting past requirements and it is equally certain that our future needs will be met in a like manner. Meanwhile, the Government has recognized the fact that our withdrawal from racing has retarded engine development and the last Congress appropriated the initial funds with which to revive high-speed

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THOUGH the Schneider competition has now passed into aviation history it will long be remembered as the incentive for the most arresting technical efforts and results ever known. In the last few years it has been the only remaining international contest in the aviation world of any real importance and has proved of inestimable value to the progress of aviation as a whole. The successful Schneider trophy contestant of today is a triumph of laboratory and engineering research, and though the cost has been enormous, the result has gone to the world's aviation industry has been incalculable. Such are the fruits of competition.
M. Jacques Schneider presented the trophy for seaplane competition to the French Aero Club in 1913. At that time he could have had no conception of the scale the contest would eventually reach or the astounding speeds that would be attained. When he presented the trophy he was a wealthy man, but in the succeeding years he met with adversity and in 1928 died in Paris, an almost extinct, the victim of poverty. What a pity that some of the fruits of the competition which he engendered did not fall to his hands.

Edison on the Flying Machine

THOMAS A. EDISON invited Henry Forman to visit him at his laboratory in East Orange, N. J., when that famous foreign flyer was here in August, 1908. At that time Mr. Edison said:
"I'll tell you what I think about this air-sailing business. As I have said, it's fate to come. They haven't got it yet, but they will. But when the question is solved you will find that the machine that goes straight up in the air—screws itself vertically into the air—has answered the riddle."
"The helicopter"? he was asked.
"Right," he replied.
That was in 1908.
About a year ago Mr. Jim Ray, vice-president and pilot of the Aeroglen Company of Ampico, dropped in at the Newark Airport with his autogiro, attended to his business and flew away again for home—Philadelphia. Mr. Edison got a glimpse of it, and asked the manager of the airport please to let him know by phone the next time one of those whirligig machines struck town, as he would like to see it close up and in action.
The manager conveyed this information to Mr. Ray, who sent word that he and a couple of friends would fly their autogiro to Newark on a given afternoon. When the flyers arrived at the field Mr. Edison was absent. Any word from him? No word. And then the telephone rang and Mrs. Edison said she was very sorry, but Mr. Edison, who had been feeling badly, was sleeping soundly and she did not want to wake him, therefore she was reporting the fact that Mr. Edison would not visit the airport as anticipated.
Mr. Ray and his friends felt somewhat disappointed, but understood the situation and after a little gossip on the field were all ready for the take-off for home, when they were notified that Mr. Edison's car had just arrived and that he wished to apologize for his delay—said he had fallen asleep, and was sorry, but would they please let him see the machine in operation.
Probably one of Mr. Ray's most indelible recollections as long as he lives will be the enthusiastic comment by the great inventor when the demonstration was completed. That was the time Mr. Edison stated that apparently the aeroglen did everything but chew tobacco.

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