

# Pioneer Days of Aviation Recalled

BY GILL ROBB WILSON.

On May 20, 1946, civil aviation in the United States will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the passage of the air commerce act of 1926—cornerstone of the American structure of the air.

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When the American Congress in 1926 first enacted the law which placed the government behind civil aviation and gave the aviation industry a legal status, all other major and most minor nations were far ahead in this respect. This column will sketch the foreign scene prior to United States recognition of the significance of civil flight.

By February 1919, Great Britain had created a civil aviation department in her Air Ministry. Within several years she had pledged £1,000,000 of subsidy to Imperial Airways which was flying scheduled routes to many European capitals, India and Africa. In 1925 her director of civil aviation was saying, "there will come a day—unless we maintain air communications—our great empire will assuredly melt into the mists of the past."

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By 1919 France had subsidized civil air transport with \$2,000,000, and created an undersecretary for aeronautics in the government. Soon she had five air lines covering Europe, Africa and the Middle East with 200 transports in operation. She had a wide-flung meteorological service, airways, some 60 factories building engines and planes, and held most of the world flying records.

In Russia in 1925 the people's commissariat for war and marine said that the economic development of Russia largely depended on aviation. At that time the Soviets had a number of transport air lines linking her principal cities, and passengers were crowding for reservations. With all her problems Russia was among the first and most enthusiastic in recognizing civil air commerce.

The importance of civil aviation in Italy was recognized by the fact that Mussolini made himself the minister of air, subsidized civil air enterprise, organized seven transport companies and declared that modern civilization must depend upon mastery of the air.

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Meanwhile, also in the early '20s, Den-

mark was subsidizing air transport with 350,000 crowns annually, Finland was operating international air commerce, and Czechoslovakia, seeing herself the aerial crossroads of Europe, had formed, under President Masaryk, a foundation for aviation development and propaganda. Belgium was in the Congo with her state-subsidized airline, Sabena. Holland had given K. L. M. millions of guilders, was flying throughout the Low Countries and had explored by air the route to Batavia and the Netherlands East Indies.

However, the foregoing and similar efforts in other nations were insignificant compared to what was brewing in Germany. There civil aviation development was already throwing long military fore-shadows. Germany led the world in commercial air transport. Of the 132 air lines of the world in 1925, Germany controlled 62. She had 19,000 miles of airway constructed within the Reich and was combining her two largest lines, Deutsche Aero Lloyd and Junkers, into one state line, Deutsche Luft Hansa, which she subsidized with 19,000,000 gold marks a year.

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Before the United States even recognized civil air transport, Germany had connected all the principal countries of Europe and had lines to the Far East and South America through an arrangement with Spain to develop Seville as the aerial heart of western Europe. German airplanes were flying more miles and carrying more passengers than British, French and Italian combined.

In South America Germany was also preparing her aviation future. In the Argentine, Junkers was subsidized. Lloyd Aereo Boliviano was organized in Bolivia. The Chilean government had ordered Junkers aircraft for military use. Scadta in Colombia was using Junkers and Dornier-Wal seaplanes. Germany was trying for exclusive air rights in Venezuela.

In fact, Germany was using aviation throughout the world as her agency of "peaceful" penetration and was getting away with it. All the money she would have used on a military air force went to civil transport. The aviation provisions in the Versailles Treaty proved to be the secret weapon of the Reich. The fat was in the fire.

In the United States Billy Mitchell was in a frenzy, for he understood what the foreign picture aloft meant to the future of the United States, where we had not yet so much as officially recognized that civil air commerce had a future.

## TODAY'S HOROSCOPE

by Genevieve Kemble