

DOC KINKADE, ENGINEER OF PLANES WHICH MADE POLAR AND TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHTS

(New York Herald-Tribune.)

When Bert Acosta climbed into the cockpit of the America on the morning of June 29 a few minutes before the big plane was to roar down the improvised runway on its scientific exploit, T. Harold Kinkade, known to the men who fly as "Doc," was sitting at the controls, his sensitive ears tuned to the hum of the three engines upon which was to depend the success or failure of the flight.

Upon him rested the responsibility of giving the final check on the motors which he had nursed from the day they had come from the Wright Aeronautical Corporation factory at Petersen, N. J., to be installed in the Fokker plane.

To know as much as any one else in the world about the operation of the motors selected for such an enterprise, and to be assigned to the task of seeing that those motors are functioning as perfectly as it was humanly possible to make them, carries with it

a responsibility which cannot be taken lightly. The utmost patience, painstaking exactness, skill, confidence and bravery to say "O. K." when the lives of others depend upon your efforts are some of the qualities which are essential to the profession of the aeronautical service engineer. In Kinkade's own words: "When working on the final inspections I—as do all others—always put myself in the seat of the pilot who is making the flight and ask myself if I have done my best. It takes days and even months to accomplish the satisfactory results before we can say 'O. K.' It means life or death to the man or men who are going up, it means thousands of dollars to the sponsors of the flight and, of course, closest to all concerned, it means success or failure."

This is the creed in the profession of those who stay on the field while others are soaring to fame and accomplishment.

Hurries to Europe.

When Kinkade had adjusted the

throttle on the last of the three big motors to undergo his scrutiny, when he had told Commander Byrd that they were as perfect as it was humanly possible to make them, it was evident that he wanted to go along to see how those motors would sound out in the middle of the Atlantic. Doubtless Commander Byrd would have risked allowing him to stow away in plain sight, but Kinkade was too much of an aeronaut to allow personal ambitions to interfere with his duties. So after arranging equipment in the fuselage of the plane, he stepped out of the cabin and waved good by to his comrades. Then he hurried to a steamer to be on hand in Europe should Commander Byrd want him.

Perhaps his part in the aerial undertakings which have made history during the last two months has not been a dramatic one, but pilots everywhere know that behind the quiet countenance of the stubby little man "who knows motors" are the qualities which have been largely responsible for the success of the undertakings.

Kinkade's knowledge of the Wright Whirlwind engine has taken him to many countries and the conscience with which he applies his knowledge has brought him much discomfort. In 1925 he went to Holland to install the engine in the first three-motor plane

ever built. Then when the same plane was bought by Commander Byrd for the North Pole flight he went to Spitzbergen to care for the motors there. The following summer he went to northern Canada to take charge of the motors of an air line operating between mining camps. When Byrd prepared for his Paris flight he joined him again to work on the motors in the America. The responsibility of giving the final check for Chamberlain and Acosta in their record fifty-one hour flight was his. When the Belanca was ready to hop off it was he who had to give the word. And then came the flight of the America, with three motors to groom for their task of lifting seven tons from Roosevelt Field and carrying the weight across the ocean.

There were hardships to all of the tasks. They meant sleepless days and nights. They meant many hours without food, for Kinkade never stops working till his job is done. But the most strenuous task of all was the preparation of the Josephine Ford for its dash to the pole.

With the thermometer hovering below zero Kinkade's technical task was complicated. He was in an unknown field, for no one could guess just how the motors would behave in the temperatures. And with the complications

of the task were the higher stakes, for if one of the motors had failed over the polar sea Byrd and Bennett could never have been gotten back. In the Atlantic, with all its perils, there were steamship lines, radio advice, collapsible boats and mild temperatures. In the Arctic there was nothing but ragged ice and solitude.

At King's Bay, where the take-off was to be made, there were problems to be met before the question of motor performance was to be considered. The planes had to be taken ashore through shifting ice floes on four lifeboats as a raft, a runway had to be trampled down in the snow and a camp had to be set up on the ice. The planes had to be assembled without derricks or tackle. To all of these problems Kinkade devoted his twenty working hours a day. Then his task came.

It was impossible to install and adjust the motors with gloves on. He worked barehanded, dipping them in stinging gasoline to wash off spark plugs, setting up tapets, measuring clearances. He paused every few minutes to warm his hands in his pockets or to dip them in warm kerosene, but he worked on two Arctic days and nights without sleep, until the motors were purring to his satisfaction and he gave Commander Byrd his "O. K." His hands were frostbitten when he saw the big Josephine Ford rise from the last drop in the runway, but under the spell of the romance of his job he was not aware of it.

Yet even the life of a service engineer is sometimes tinted with the spectacular. During his long career as an engine expert Kinkade has spent much time at army and navy posts as a technical expert. It was in that capacity that he was assigned to Langley Field, Virginia, in February, 1922, when the dirigible Roma was to undergo her tests with new Liberty motors, replacing the Italian engines. Kinkade was to go along "to see how they sounded." He was on board as she was about to take off, but an army officer sent him back to the hangar to get a parachute. He hurried back, only to find that the ship had risen without him. A few minutes later he saw her come down in flames when she dropped on a high-tension wire. Thirty-four of the forty-five aboard her were dead.

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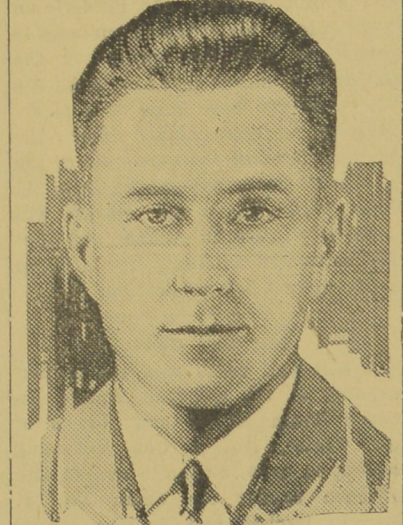
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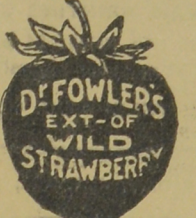
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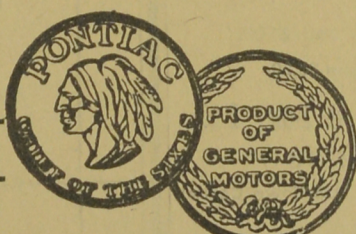
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