Report
ON
THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL AVIATORS.

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TEMPERAMENT.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE authors of this paper are respectively a pilot of 600 hours' experience and a medical officer stationed at an aerodrome. Their observations led them to the conclusion that the mark of the successful aviator was the possession of a suitable temperament, and in the following columns will be found a description of this faculty as shown in the cases they personally studied. In the second part of the paper will be found certain information obtained from experienced pilots, together with a few brief statistics, which are intended to show that the opinions of the authors are shared by pilots and confirmed by actual flying tests.

THE TEMPERAMENT OF THE SUCCESSFUL AVIATOR.

The enormous number of pilots who have qualified recently is a proof that the aviator is not a "super-man." It is true that we see certain men who perform marvellous "stunts," but when we come to talk to them and examine them with regard to physique and mentality we find that they are quite ordinary people.

Flying is not now confined to the public school boy, the cavalry officer, or the athlete. We take many of our pilots at present from the lower middle classes and some from the artisan class. The most useful method of discovering whether or not the candidate or pupil is likely to become successful is to study the life-history of the pilots whom we know to be efficient. This demonstrates the fact that there are many characteristics common to the successful pilot which are absent from the pupil who has been withdrawn from instruction in flying on account of lack of aptitude.

Sport.—The successful aviator has always the attributes of a sportsman. As a schoolboy he takes part in all forms of athletics and usually played for the school in one game at least. After leaving school he still keeps it up, and probably goes in for other kinds of sport—hunting, shooting, fishing, rowing, golfing, motoring, &c. He joins the Air Force because he is keen on flying, as it appeals to his sporting proclivities.

Character.—He possesses resolution, initiative, presence of mind, sense of humour, judgment; is alert, cheerful, optimistic, happy-go-lucky, generally a good fellow, and frequently lacking in imagination.

Age.—The majority of successful pilots are under 25 years of age, the explanation obviously being that the resiliency of youth enables them to accustom themselves more rapidly to a new occupation and to recover quickly from the strain and stress they are called upon to undergo.

High-spirited.—Anyone who has lived with pilots for any length of time cannot fail to notice that they possess in a very high degree a fund of animal spirits and excessive vitality.

Amusements.—When they have finished flying for the day their favourite amusements are theatres, music (chiefly ragtime), cards, and dancing, and it appears necessary for the well-being of the average pilot that he should indulge in a really riotous evening at least once or twice a month.

Alcohol.—Alcohol is taken freely by the older men, but the young, fit pilot serving at home hardly ever touches it. It is not necessary to legislate on the subject of alcohol for pilots; they are well aware of the danger of taking too much before flying. The desire for alcohol comes with "nerves," staleness and stress of service, but the fit pilot needs no stimulant. In so far that on active service it enables a man to sleep after an exciting day and promotes good-fellowship in the mess, its effect may be said to be beneficial, but for the young cadet and the fit pilot on home stations it is entirely unnecessary.

Marriage.—The majority of successful pilots are unmarried, and our own observations tend to show that marriage is a definite handicap owing to the increased sense of responsibility. If a man marries after he has flown several hundred hours, and flying has become automatic, marriage may not apparently affect him for some time. In some cases it may even make him steadier and more careful, but sooner or later it will in most cases have a definitely deteriorating effect.

Although this objection could be advanced for any branch of the service, yet a careful consideration will show that there are special reasons why marriage is an exceptional disadvantage to the pupil under instruction. The training of officers for the infantry, for example, is practically unaccompanied by danger, and it is only when drafted overseas that they may be said to begin to know fear. By this time, however, they have learned all their duties, and the discipline acquired will help them to face their possibilities. The pupil under instruction in flying, on the other hand, whilst learning to fly in conjunction with his other training, faces great dangers, in some ways almost as great as he will ever be called upon to undergo. Being generally in England, he has not the feeling that he is in the actual zone of hostilities, and the risks he takes are, as one might say, undergone in cold blood.

The unmarried man (faced with the possibility of crashing whilst doing his first solo) in most cases dismisses the thought or takes the risk in the same way as a horse-rider puts his mount at a fence in strange country. The married man has the knowledge of what death may mean to his wife and family, and, moreover, has the opportunity in many cases of discussing it with his wife and manufacturing in his own home a condition of nervousness which eventually becomes so great that he confesses to his instructor that he has completely lost his nerve.

Occupation.—We found that the best type of pilot was seldom drawn from a sedentary occupation, that those who had lived a sheltered life were not so good as those who had roughed it, and we discovered the interesting fact that most of those pilots who before they joined were in business or doing clerical work possessed considerable sporting aptitude, and as soon as they had finished work would hurry to the cricket or football field.

Hands.—One of the most important characteristics we have noticed in successful aviators is "hands." This characteristic is difficult to define, but may be described as follows. The horse-rider with good hands is able to sense the mentality of a horse by the feel of the reins and also to convey his desires accurately to his mount. We have never known of a man who has consistently been in the first flight in the hunting field making anything but a good pilot.

In the same way the pilot with good hands senses unconsciously the various movements of the aeroplane, and rectifies any unusual or abnormal evolutions almost before they occur. The skilful pilot appears to anticipate "bumps." He is invariably a graceful flyer, never unconsciously throws an undue strain on the machine, just as a good riding man will never make a horse's mouth bleed.

"Hands" appear to be congenital and cannot be acquired, although they may be improved and *vice versa*. Motor-car and motor-cycle racing, owing to the powerful grip that must be maintained to keep the machine on the track, tend to spoil "hands" even if this faculty was previously in existence. We have produced a mechanical contrivance for the purpose of demonstrating the difference between light and heavy-handed pilots with which we are at present experimenting and which we hope will prove of practical value.

The fighting scout.—The fighting scout is usually the enthusiastic youngster, keen on flying, full of what one might call the "joy of life," possessing an average intelligence, but knowing little or nothing of the details of his machine or engine; he has little or no imagination, no sense of responsibility, keen sense of humour, able to think and act quickly, and endowed to a high degree with the afore-mentioned quality, "hands." He very seldom takes his work seriously, but looks upon "Hun-strafing" as a great game.