AERONAUTICS

Langley Dispute Ends

Long controversy between Smithsonian Institution and Wrights over whether Dr. Langley's machine might have flown is settled by new statement.

➤ THE LONG DISPUTE over the "flyability" of the Langley flying machine, which has divided aviators and aeronautical engineers into two disputing camps for nearly 40 years, has finally been definitely settled, by open acknowledgment on the part of Smithsonian authorities that this early airplane could not have been successfully flown as it was built in 1903. A full statement to this effect has been issued by Dr. Charles G. Abbot, secretary of the Institution, which has been accepted as satisfactory by Dr. Orville Wright, surviving member of the famous pair of brothers who made the first successful powered flights at Kitty Hawk, N. C., in the same year that saw the Langley machine's tragic unsuccess.

The story of the celebrated dispute may be briefly summarized: After successful tests of models in 1896 and 1903, Dr. Samuel P. Langley, then secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, built a full-sized, engine-powered machine. In two launching attempts, during October and December, 1903, this machine was wrecked without getting into the air. Many persons blamed the failure on faulty launching apparatus and claimed that the plane, or "aerodrome" as it was then called, would have flown had it become air-borne.

In 1914, incident to a patent suit between the Wright brothers and Glenn Curtiss, the Langley plane was taken from the National Museum, reconditioned and given a new engine. It made a number of takeoffs from the surface of Lake Keuka, N. Y., but did not make a sustained flight.

Supporters of the Wright claims pointed out some 35 changes in construction that were made in the course of reconditioning, and declared that without these the Langley machine could not have flown at all. So strongly did Dr. Orville Wright feel about this, and about claims subsequently made on the label of the Langley machine when it was placed in the National Museum, that he refused to permit the original Wright machine to be shown with it, and instead sent it to a museum in England in 1928.

In this status the problem and the attendant controversy were inherited by Dr. Abbot when he became secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Now, after painstaking investigations, he acknowledges the validity of the Wright claims.

Full text of Dr. Abbot's statement follows:

"Since I became Secretary in 1928 I have made many efforts to compose the Smithsonian-Wright controversy, which I inherited. I will now, speaking for the Smithsonian Institution, make the following statement in an attempt to correct as far as possible acts and assertions of former Smithsonian officials that may have been misleading, or are held to be detrimental to the Wrights.

"I sincerely regret that the Institution employed to make the tests of 1914 an agent who had been an unsuccessful defendant in patent litigation brought against him by the Wrights.

"I sincerely regret that statements were repeatedly made by officers of the Institution that the Langley machine was flown in 1914 with certain changes of the machine necessary to use pontoons, without mentioning the other changes mentioned in Dr. Wright's list.

"I point out that Assistant Secretary Rathbun was misinformed when he stated that the Langley machine 'without modification' made 'successful flights.'

"I sincerely regret the public statement by officers of the Institution that 'the tests of 1914 showed that the late Secretary Langley had succeeded in building the first aeroplane capable of sustained free flight with a man.'"

The publication of this report, already accepted by Dr. Wright, should clear the way, Dr. Abbot hopes, for the return of the original Kitty Hawk plane to the United States and its exhibition in the U. S. National Museum.

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ROOF FIRST—To speed construction of the Wright Aeronautical Corporation's new engine plant, and to avoid the use of steel, the concrete roof was first poured atop these platforms and at the same time into wooden forms to shape the supporting columns. When the concrete had hardened, the platforms were pulled out from under the roof and another 114-foot section poured. And so on.